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**Delegation and Depiction:  
The Textual Authorities of Photographic Criticism**

**Elizabeth P. Seaton**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Faculty  
of  
Arts and Science**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
Concordia University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada**

**September, 1990**

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## Abstract

### Delegation and Depiction: The Textual Authorities of Photographic Criticism

Elizabeth P. Seaton, Ph.D.  
Concordia University, 1990

The project of this thesis was to investigate key theoretical and historical shifts which have allowed for the political practices of photographic criticism. Centered upon changing concepts of 'the subject' within different theoretical domains, the thesis looks to how these alternating concepts have been appropriated for the purposes of photographic criticism. In particular, the thesis finds that the degree to which photographic criticism can claim certain epistemological authority is dependent upon those historical and political circumstances within which it is situated. Thus, concepts of 'the subject' are examined as they extend across the historical and theoretical purviews of structuralism, post-structuralism, feminist and psychoanalytic theories, discourse analysis, and postmodernism. It is argued that photographic criticism mines these theoretical domains not only for operations of critical activity but textual authority. While historical alterations in theories of 'the subject' have enabled photographic criticism to continuously challenge received authorities of photographic representation, they have also, often paradoxically, allowed for the continuation of this criticism's distanced authoritative judgements.



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## Introduction

Recently, a certain 'crisis of representation' has become pronounced within a number of theoretical domains. While the genealogy of this 'crisis' is a protracted one, its point of departure stems from various acknowledgments of the political limitations and liabilities of representation. In general, it rests upon the realization that representation entails not just a practice of depiction, but one of delegation (Mercer and Julien, 1988: 4); as involving not only a supposed correspondence with appearances, but also a troubling capacity to 'speak for', or be representative of, a typified community of people or things. As Edward Said has recently argued, "To represent someone or even something has now become an endeavor as complex and as problematic as an asymptote, with consequences for certainty and decidability as fraught with difficulties as can be imagined" (1989: 206). Under the pressure of various historical and theoretical refusals, a dilemma is now posed not only for the authorities of representation, but the authoritative representations of the critic.

Certainly, photographic criticism has not been left immune from this 'crisis'. Indeed, the very nature of its chosen object of inquiry - a highly contingent and provisional medium which is at once 'real' and illusory - poses itself as a problematic 'asymptote' which continually

manages to curve away from, as it draws attention to, efforts to posit decisive definitions. For, despite assertions to the contrary, photography as such is not a stable and unified ontological object: it is not a 'thing-in-itself'. Its significance cannot be traced to an attribute, but a relation. The photograph needs to be 'authored', and foremost in this task are the authoritative explanations of critics. Yet supporting these enunciations are other 'authorships'; found most commonly in the actuality of a 'real world', or the authenticity of an artistic subjectivity. More so, photography requires a 'subject' in order to complete its status as object: a subject who makes the photograph or takes the picture; a subject who views the photograph and 'knows' the 'reality' there. Thus, the explanatory apparatus of photographic criticism changes, as it is dependent upon, changing conceptualizations of 'the subject' and the photographic object. And as photographic critics attempt to cast their interpretations in the shape of those objects they seek to explain, the invented design of their own representations are brought to the fore.

I am concerned here with the changes and shifts, the 'significant breaks', in critical writings which have addressed the relationship between a 'subject', subjectivities and photographic mediation. Regarding this relationship as a distinctive problematic for the

authorities of visual and critical representation, I evince key theoretical and political alterations in the way concepts of 'the subject' have served as a point of assertion and debate, particularly as these reconceptualizations have historically allowed for the function of photographic criticism. What is addressed here are not the descriptive histories of theoretical constructs, but rather the manner in which their explanations have been appropriated, and act as both product and process of the photographic practices and criticism they inform. For changes in the problematic of spectating subjects, subjectivities and photographic representation are contingent with a complex of historical factors which both conflict and collude with the ways questions about it can be asked, the frameworks in which they are proposed, and the manner in which they can be answered.

The continuing conversation about subjectivity and photography has always been interrupted at various points. To follow the diversities and convergences of this discourse then is to examine the conditions of possibility which have permitted or prohibited different things to be said at a given moment in time within different theoretical and epistemological frameworks. Moreover, it is to look to the larger field of social, historical and cultural relations which inform and re-work theoretical approaches to photographic practice and criticism. This confrontation of the shifts of history and its formalization, of social

practices and configurations of knowledge, allows one to avoid closing off theory from its relations to practice. As Stuart Hall proposes:

Such shifts in perspective reflect, not only the results of an internal intellectual labor, but the manner in which real historical developments and transformations are appropriated in thought, and provide Thought, not with its guarantee of 'correctness' but with its fundamental orientations, its conditions of existence. It is because of this complex articulation between thinking and historical reality, reflected in the social categories of thought, and the continuous dialectic between 'knowledge' and 'power', that the breaks are worth recording (1980: 57).

Drawing from such a materialist perspective, it is possible to discern how the myriad of relations between photographic practices and spectating subjects, varying across "real historical developments", has so often acted as that ground of evidence which has disturbed the authorities of photographic criticism and signaled its restrictions. And yet of course, as an object of inquiry, it is precisely this relationship which has, conventionally and presently, been used as a theoretical support in authorizing a critic's investigations and his or her tendentious explanations. In working through this "continuous dialectic," I distinguish the ways in which theoretical and photographic practices, and their cultural and political operations, have lent photographic criticism not only its "fundamental orientations" and "conditions of existence," but also its "guarantees of correctness," certitude, or authority. And equally, I examine the other side of what can be termed a

double legitimation: in which photographic criticism in turn dispenses the 'correct' theoretical, political, and hence aesthetic line for practicing photographers.

Thus, my investigations center upon how varying theoretical modes of interpretation and inquiry into 'subjects', subjectivities and the apparatus of photography have been mobilized, across different points in time, for the practices and privileges of photographic criticism. In marking out the manner in which theoretical concepts of the subject have been appropriated by photographic criticism, I examine how each, contingent with different political motivations and historical determinations, have variously enabled photographic criticism to constitute its own object of inquiry and the "subjects" appropriate to it. Moreover, the epistemological assumptions which underpin these different, though interrelated, theoretical 'borrowings', are approached as not only a source of critical activity, but as an operation of textual authority. In this way, the problematic of the relationship between spectating subjects and photographic representation is considered as it manifests itself within photographic criticism as a particular production of knowledge. The central concern of the thesis thus addresses not only key shifts in the politics of critical analyses of photography and subjectivity - and how they have set the terms for future debates - but also the desire for epistemological certainty

and authority, which, in varying degrees, is at stake in criticism's inventive explanations.

Examples of Anglo-American photographic criticism published in books and journals, as well as selected photographic works, (both roughly between the period of the 1960's to the present), supply the concrete basis for the thesis's inquiry. As the works of Michel Foucault have shown, while the "official" documents of an age do not carry any transparent 'truth' in and of themselves, they may lend clues to the historical practices which have made them possible, and which have motivated and given meaning to their politics. Thus, rather than conducting an immanent analysis of photographs and critical writings on photography, I engage in a study of the varying social, political and historical formations which have underlined and informed both photographic criticism and photographic texts.

In explicating and clarifying the terms of this engagement, a key set of queries and problems are addressed throughout the thesis. Foremost is the question of what criticism is and how it has been distinguished from theory. A conventional answer, such as that voiced by Victor Burgin (1982;1984), sees criticism as evaluative and normative. Moreover, such criticism is viewed as parasitic in its authoritative judgments: unlike theory, criticism does not advance arguments, but makes assertions whose authorities are usually based upon the 'self-evident' explanations of



aesthetic theories. The contemporary situation blurs the distinctions between theory and criticism. With the historical and theoretical reformulations of post-structuralism and postmodernism, the philosophical edifices of exclusionary identities, totalities and master narratives which conventional criticism rested upon have been undermined. A result of this movement has been the collapse of critical distance and the acknowledgment by critics of those historical and theoretical processes which inform their assertions. Yet, despite the embrace of those theories which have tempered its arrogation of authorities, aspects of photographic criticism still allows it to base its claims within the jurisdiction of a cognoscenti whose operations secure canonization. In this sense, much of criticism today appears to be a different rendition of the old lines laid down previously. It is this paradoxical situation which informs much of the thesis's emphasis.

Further questions both situate and follow from this concern. What are the analytic and critical tools used in these writings and in what ways have they shifted, given changes in intellectual thought and historical practice? How has the photograph been understood as an ontological construct, particularly as it is continually (re)fabricated as a distinct cultural form articulated to varying political projects? In what ways do the divergent tendencies of 'theory and practice' play into the constitutions of

criticism, and how has this constructed dichotomy been transfigured? And what is the enunciative voice used by a particular critic at a particular point in time, and to what ends? The subjective analysis of Roland Barthes' writings on photography offered an excess of first-person 'I's' . And while post-structuralism's anti-humanist subject has had great influence within critical circles as of late, the use of a fully-unified, but effaced, speaking position for critics appears to be tenaciously retained. What is at root in a critic's reticence to insert or implicate him or herself into the text?

Quite obviously, such a series of overdetermined questions and practical operations overlap and impinge upon one another. For this reason, the thesis cannot approach its problematic strictly from a periodic perspective - marking off its "significant breaks" into neat categories of thought. To do so would be to mimic those tendencies towards restrictive definitions which it purports to critique, and also to deny the materiality of both the apparatus of photography and those structures of reception by which theoretical positions have been incorporated into photographic criticism. Thus, the chapters in the dissertation proceed roughly along different intellectual, discursive, and photographic productions which are variously interjected by certain lines of argumentation. While such a trajectory is historical, it does not necessarily follow a linear history.

Chapter One situates and contextualizes those conditions of existence under which a modernist aesthetic and canon for photography prevailed. My interest in accounting for this particular historical moment pertains to the ways in which certain of its tendencies still continue to shadow current practices of photography and photographic criticism. Thus, in leveling my attention upon the critical production and reception of photographic works from the 1960's - particularly those championed by the Museum of Modern Art under the guidance of John Szarkowski - I explicate the assemblage of discourses, economies, and institutions whose determinations persist within the immediate history of photography. Of primary concern are the discursive supports of a liberal pluralism which enabled photographers to show off a risky encounter with 'difference', while retaining a prerogative of immunity from the politics their images entailed. Appended to this discourse was also the constitution of an ineffable and unaccountable subjectivity for photographers, which allowed them to be held at a remove from the banalities and the politics of human existence. Similarly, in keeping with a modernist aesthetic, photography was ontologically constructed as a distinct and autonomous object, and thus could be formalized beyond the interruptions of politics. In examining the interdependence of these formations, and their relations with institutions of criticism, art, and

commerce, I mark out the consequences of a photographic ontology and epistemology whose effects continue into the present.

Chapter Two examines the appropriation of structuralist theories for the activities of photographic criticism and practice in North America. I begin by mapping the particular political and historical conjunctures which allowed for structuralism's introduction into this domain of cultural and artistic production. I then address the means by which structuralism's theorizing of representation entailed a strategic deliberation which enabled certain analytic and political efforts.

I argue that within the context of North America, the critical activity of structuralism in explicating the politics of the photograph was limited. While structuralism enabled a number of new critical photographic practices, (particularly within Conceptual Art), its activities were circumscribed within that situation to which it was articulated: namely, 'the art world'. Moreover, early structuralist semiotics, with its formalist emphasis - the assertion that art and language are self-contained - accommodated the continuing presence of realist and formalist constructs for photography. In this respect, the efforts of photographic critics to structurally assess the photograph as a social practice of representation were severely restrained. In sum, photographic critics continued to view the photograph as an isolated object of analysis; an

isolation which contradictorily precipitated the recuperation of modernist strategies of formalism, the artistic 'subject', notions of 'the real', and realism as an approach to that real which photography supposedly corresponded. Hence, the radical potential of structuralism was inverted to a conventional procedure which reinstated the photograph into the autonomous space of the art object.

Chapter Three turns to quite different circumstances in which structuralism was applied to photographic practices and criticism in Britain. Key to this difference was the presence of established theoretical constructs which took as their problematic the material relations of culture and representation, and the absence of a deeply-rooted institutional base for art photography. In particular, I consider the contemporaneous problematic of the so-called structuralist/culturalist debate, whose transactions were especially formative for the articulation of structuralism to a critical photographic practice.

Centering my inquiry upon the concrete practice of a socialist photography and criticism, I examine how a structuralist semiotics was mined in order to critique and fracture the dominant institutional structures of photographic meaning. Yet, I find that in general this activity was also plagued by the liabilities of certain assumptions which tended to reduce ideological process to 'false consciousness' and mystification. This again can be

attributed to the conceptual structures used by an early formalist semiotics, which tended to place the photograph within a space in which it could be synchronically and singularly viewed - closed off and sealed to its own internal workings.

In reading photographic texts in formal isolation, this structuralism reinforced the use of dualistic oppositions. The result was a proclivity to counter a real or truthful experience against a falsified representation, and to hierarchically separate a 'false' surface from a more 'real' deep structure. Additionally, this use of opposition in both photographic work and critical writings not only acted to isolate the photograph from its material field of relations, but allowed for the recuperation of a reflectionist discourse of realism. Furthermore, the relation of exteriority which structuralism lent photographic criticism meant that critics could continue to ignore the lines drawn around their own institutional and professional structures. And yet, in a most important way, the experiences of socialist photographers who also theorized photographic production - Jo Spence, Victor Burgin, Terry Dennett, or Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn - led them to use this combinant form to move on and revise from their previous practical and theoretical base.

In Chapter Four, I consider the ways in which post-structuralism's primacy of 'the subject' in theorizing ideology and representation acted to break down the distance

of previous accounts - a distance created through the conceptual opposition of closed structures and recreated through a critical exteriority. Importantly, it was the contributions of feminist theorists who would annul some of the distance overwhelmingly centered upon difference, and refocus the project of photographic criticism.

Taking its point of departure from Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" (1977), this chapter considers how the restrictive conditions of a photographic text have moved from the certain origins of authorship to the uncertain destinations of a spectating subject. Briefly summarizing the contributions of Althusser and Lacan, I find that the positivity of post-structuralism for photographic criticism lies in the way it forwards the articulated notion of ideology as larger, but no more powerful than, the collusion of photographs, discourses and subjects upon which it depends. Moreover, I find that such a notion forces critics to carefully disentangle those myriad factors at work in the historical present of a photograph.

The remainder of this chapter is limited to a discussion of photographic criticism which works to suspend authoritative statements, whether appended to the photograph, the viewing subject, or the critic. In particular, I examine the photographic writings of feminist critics (specifically Abigail Solomon-Godeau and Elke Towne), who locate their problematic squarely within the

active relations of photographic mediation and gendered subjectivity. Moreover, I examine Roland Barthes' Camera Lucida (1981), which, derived and enunciated from the author's own subjective experience, explicitly troubles the relations of exteriority normally enacted by photographic criticism. Emphasizing the historical dimension of photographs and subjectivities, each of these critics look to how individuals are both subjects of and subjected to the social constructions of a photograph, while recognizing the fluidity of this process.

In Chapter Five, I examine how certain aspects of psychoanalytic theory have directed photographic criticism. Basing this investigation primarily upon the critical writings and photographic works of Victor Burgin, I discern not only the positivities of this approach, but also a number of liabilities which are found to have important political consequences. Foremost of these is the tendency of this photographic criticism to explain the bearings of sexed subjectivity and photography solely upon the keystone of sexual difference. At root then is a predisposition to view all subjectivities and identities as defined in differential relation to or against the meter of male desire. This has the effect of disallowing other propositions which may see this construction as equally activated by other present and historical cultural factors. In this respect, criticism informed by psychoanalytic theory is closed off to alternative interpretations voiced by those



who are not white, male, Western, or most noticeably, heterosexual.

Additionally, I examine how this form of photographic criticism has acted to fabricate its own canon. The inclusion of the language of psychoanalytic theory into photographic practices has often produced works that are as obtuse as the theory which motivates them. Moreover, the exclusionary tendencies of this psychoanalytic photographic practice and criticism has also allowed it to produce its own academic 'school', whose players or performers are only admitted via indoctrination into an abstract theory. In sum, I find that the peremptory consequences of a photographic criticism informed by psychoanalytic theory attest to a certain desire for critical and artistic authority.

In Chapter Six, I look to those critical histories of photography which take the 'photographic archive' as their central object of inquiry. Informed by Michel Foucault's studies into the field constituted by discourse and epistemology, this photographic criticism looks to the specific and changing conditions which make possible the appearance, the functioning, and the instrumentality of certain photographic knowledges and truths. In examining the critical writings of John Tagg, Alan Sekula, Roberta McGrath and others, I mark out the positivity of a form of analysis which bases itself directly upon the contingent

ground of the historical. This form of analysis excavates not only the truth claims of photographic practices, but also has the capacity to call careful attention to the limits of (critical) representation itself. In thinking through those relations of power which at any moment designate a photographic practice, these critics may also be compelled to look to those related beliefs and activities which give their own practice meaning.

However, I find that this mode of analysis also carries its own determinations. Crucially, there is a tendency to award too much power to the apparatus of photography, particularly as an instrument of surveillance and discipline. In effect, this photographic criticism often asserts a predictable quality to the effectivity of photographic practices, especially as such practices are seen to reproduce the relations of production necessary for the existence of the state. Such an emphasis upon the prohibitive powers of photography tend to contradictorily deny both the historical specificity of the practice, and the shifts in the different powers and knowledges that articulate it.

In Chapter Seven I address the activity of photographic criticism under the ontological and epistemological shifts of postmodernism. My particular emphasis lies with how certain photographic practices - designated as 'postmodern' by that criticism which interpreted and designed them - moved from a critical and conflictual practice to a

collusive and commodified style. From this contradictory site, I am able to address the difficulties, of not only locating critical practice within that cultural apparatus which it seeks to contest, but photographic criticism as well. For as the critic is the principle agent who signals the criticality of a photographic practice - thus marking its worth - the complicity involved in the production of interpretation and explanation of photography and the production of a photographic canon is brought into view.

In particular, I find that certain concepts appropriated from postmodern epistemologies have acted to reinforce, as they disguise, the recuperative operations of a postmodern photographic criticism. Under postmodernism, claims have been made not only for the end of historical difference, but the collapse of critical distance - that enabling vantage point of exteriority - which assures the veracity of a critic's statements. Indeed, recently the 'redundancy' of the critic has been proclaimed. I find that this move only serves to erase all those differences which inform and bind a critic's explanations to specific institutional, political and epistemological situations. Moreover, I find that postmodernism's denial of difference works towards an apolitical pluralism. I conclude this chapter by questioning the assertions of a theory which claims that knowledge and truth are false, and that the 'subject' is dead, at the very time when certain people have

begun to claim certain knowledges for themselves, and begun to claim themselves as subjects.

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## Chapter One

### Certain Bequests: Modernist Markets and Meanings for Photography

Diane Arbus slashed her wrist and bled to death in her Westbeth apartment - sometime late Monday or early Tuesday, since her diary contained an entry dated Monday, July 26. ...

Of her death, Richard Avedon, who knew her well, said, "Nothing about her life, her photographs, or her death was accidental or ordinary. They were mysterious and decisive and unimaginable, except to her. Which is the way it is with genius."

A.D. Coleman, The Village Voice.  
August 5, 1971.

As a "tutelary spirit", it is customary for genius to visit after death. Moreover, genius seems to be a posthumous guardian with a preference for a particular gender: its gifts of extraordinary and instinctive imagination more commonly bestowed upon men. Only in more uncommon circumstances, such as death by one's own hand, is genius vested upon women. The romanticism which genius connotes, and which comes so easily for men, can seemingly only be attained for women in madness.

Diane Arbus is well-known for her photographic portraits from the sixties in which she portrayed, with an unsettling eccentricity, the normalcy of the grotesque and the grotesqueness of normalcy. In a decade in which popular culture was obsessed with the perversity of American society, Arbus's work did not stand apart in any general way from her contemporaries. The subject matter of the late sixties was the traumatic, and those who got the closest to

it were the heroes of the day. Like Tom Wolfe's (1970) stories of Park Ave. matrons wooing Black Panthers at fancy cocktail parties, the idea was to get intimate with the lowbrow or the controversial, but without over-stepping a fine line of difference. For photographers, this meant discarding the social and political concerns of earlier documentary practice for a document that testified to individual aberration and expression. Social insight coexisted with and enhanced a self-portrait. The challenge was to associate with the ruined and the ruinous, and to emphasize the risks involved in this encounter, but without actually coming to ruin yourself.

Critics and eulogists of Arbus make much of the analogy between her work and that of combat photographers, whose images were widely inscribed within the public consciousness at this time. <sup>(1)</sup> "I'm sure there are limits", she is quoted as saying. "God knows, when the troops start advancing on you, you do approach that stricken feeling where you perfectly well can get killed" (Sontag, 1977: 39; Green, 1984: 120). The problem, and the prodigal myth, of Arbus was that she got too close. This dangerous proximity was only confirmed and advanced by her suicide. With her death, her representations of tortured souls became all the more self-representative; her incursions into the private disasters of others could be read as depictions of her own private and tragic vision. The cruel instrumentality of her

portraits could now slide all the more easily onto the terrain of the honorific, because, after all, these were really self-portraits. Her photographic victimage of the disfigured and the disenfranchised became justifiable, in that she too was now framed as a victim of her own catastrophe.

But of course this analogy did not entail a mutual correspondence. Arbus's subjects sat mute; objects to be contemplated as testimony of either the deformities of society or a deformed, introspective vision. In any event, through the intertwining discourses of realism and expressionism, their demotion to objecthood served only to promote the authorship and auteurism of Diane Arbus. Constructed as records of a social reality refracted through an individual sensibility, these portraits exemplify the conventional epistemological notion of the author; in which the work supposedly corresponds foremost to a original expression, and secondly, that this original expression is the result of a self-possessed and authorizing subject.

The construction of authorship of course is also bound up with the construction of canon. The interdependence of these operations necessitates a peculiar contradiction of differences and similarities. The author must be constituted as standing alone, independent in her unique vision, but also participating within a continuum to which she can be referred to and understood. Arbus's suicide stood as perhaps her greatest signifier of independence. To be both



mad and dead is perhaps the greatest index of autonomy to be achieved by an artist, particularly if this artist is a woman. As the photographic critic A.D. Coleman wrote in his black-bordered obituary, entitled "Diane Arbus: The Mirror is Broken":

Suicide can be either a confession of defeat or a hymn of triumph, an admission of one's inability to confront the pitilessness of life or a defiant refusal to tolerate it, a self-erasure or a self-definition, but it is always a private act, a final 'mind-your-own-damn-business' hurled into the teeth of the universe, and anyone who takes that irrevocable step has earned his or her privacy (1971: 35).

Despite the independence that Arbus 'earned' through her act of suicide, she was also brought under the containment of canon in order that her creative expressions be situated and thus legitimated within and for the imperatives of 'art photography'. In short, her work had to be located within the previous established lineage, affinities and influences of earlier photographers. Even before her death, Arbus's work was not solely considered, or evaluated, on its own. It was already set, as T.S. Eliot writes of canon, "for contrast and comparison among the dead" (1975: 109). While constructed as asserting an independent and conflictual individuality, Arbus's photograph's also had to be situated in such a manner as to confirm and conform to the reified hagiography of dead 'masters'. Thus we have John Szarkowski's celebration of the stylistic affiliations of "new photographers" (including Arbus), in the catalogue accompanying the 1970 exhibition,

### New Photography U.S.A.

It seems clear that the serious photographer in the United States is more thoroughly familiar than his counterpart elsewhere with the work of photography's twentieth century masters: Atget, Stieglitz, Strand, Man Ray, Moholy Nagy, Kertesz, Weston, Cartier Bresson, Evans, Brandt and the rest. When this familiarity has coincided with talent, the result has not been imitation but challenge and rejuvenation (1971: 15).

With this litany of names, Szarkowski has set up an ideal order to which the "serious photographer" must conform and be held in contrast to. And yet, as Abigail Solomon-Godeau has pointed out, this evaluative schemata also "provides the terms by which the art of the past may be reassessed or repositioned in keeping with what is deemed important in the present" (1986: 223). In this sense, it is the degree to which a new photographer's work contests - as well as coheres to - the photographic canon, which allows the re-evaluation and re-definition (or what Szarkowski prefers to name "challenge and rejuvenation"), of previous photographic texts and their semantic possibilities. For Szarkowski, this quality is again described in terms of "independence":

The photographers in this exhibition are either young or recently young. In either case they have emerged as independent artists within the last decade. No single adjective will describe and give coherence to the best work of this period, unless that adjective might be independent. The work shown here has not been produced for existing markets - either those of commerce or those of the connoisseur. It has been produced rather in response to the photographers' personal understanding of photography's potential; their sense of how past achievements have defined present possibilities (1971: 15).

With the institution of a pedigree of historical 'achievements', newer, subsequent works can be held in comparison and said to take their direction from the patronage of the past. In this way, the authority of a legacy of dead, male photographers is kept secure. Conversely, the photographic practices of the present act to effect and alter the works of the past; not only changing the way these past 'masters' may be interpreted and discursively constructed, but also actually influencing who or what may be included into the ascendancy of saints, thus often disrupting their immortality. Despite the nettlesome contradictions that arise in a fabrication that attempts to embrace concurrently the 'independence' and the inheritance of a photographer, it is this dynamic operation which allows canon to shift and reorder its affirmations to the movements of time.

In a sense, this is an epistemological case of having your cake and eating it too. Being influenced by tradition is enunciated as a distinctively positive characteristic: "the documentary spirit, with its regard for intellectual clarity, emotional reserve, and technical austerity, is clearly visible in the work of Arbus and Winogrand" (Szarkowski, *ibid.*). Similarly, the photographer who is influenced casts her shadow backwards upon the influential as well. Thus, Szarkowski's inclusion of Arbus into the social-documentary aesthetic of Progressive Era and New Deal photography (both within the New Photographers U.S.A. show

and his earlier MoMA exhibit entitled New Documents, 1967), allows her work to be understood within the rhetoric of 'compassionate insight' which attaches itself so easily to the documentary genre. This move is important given a number of factors: the feminine quality of "compassion" is emphasized in the work of virtually the only female photographer to be widely exhibited at this time, while it simultaneously counters or tempers the 'emotional detachment' which was valorized in her work and that of her male colleagues. Similarly, Arbus's inclusion adds to the particularly iconic status that documentary photography possesses within American culture; further distracting attention away from the historical conditions of documentary photography's production. It is the nature of canon to prescribe certain responses as it resists others, and while Arbus's 'familiarity' with the paradigm of documentary photography paradoxically installs her as a compassionate, self-expressive individual, the apotheosis of documentary photography is further served by being isolated outside of any social or political considerations which may disrupt this deification.

As the "First Viceroy of Photography" (Callahan, 1978), John Szarkowski's prolonged direction of the Museum of Modern Art's Photography Department has brought much to bear upon decisions of whether a certain photographer is to be included within the annals of history, or not. As an

essayist, curator, collector and missionary for his aesthetic, Szarkowski operates as a tastemaker of perhaps unmatched influence within photography. Inheriting the critical and curatorial deanery which has always been the province of one man, (Beaumont Newhall from 1940 to 1947; Edward Steichen until 1962), the implications of Szarkowski's preferences, expectations and investments into the 'art of photography' range far.

And yet, the theoretical and aesthetic framework from which the canonical configuration of late sixties and early seventies 'art photography' emerged was not solely the provenance of this one man. The fortunes of Arbus and her contemporaries cannot be described as simply the result of Szarkowski's determinations at the helm of MoMA's photography department. Rather, the presentation and reception of photography in the late sixties and early seventies had to do with a complex of conditions available at this particular historical moment which extends beyond the hermetic boundaries of its critical representation. Certainly the manner in which photographic critics - including Szarkowski - constructed photography as a particular object of inquiry, and the frameworks by which they proposed and explained this form of cultural production, strongly militated the constitution of canon. And this is my primary concern. Yet the aesthetic value and cultural status secured for this photographic practice did not lie within the specialized actions of photographic

criticism alone. Photographic criticism itself, as a recently validated epistemological production, was also articulated to and dependent upon the myriad configurations of knowledge and social practices that existed and allowed for it during this time. It would be a mistake therefore to assume that this particular construction of photography and its critical reception was contained within a unified and limited sphere.

Thus far, I have limited my investigations of Arbus to a somewhat insular inquiry into her inclusion within the sixties photographic canon. In focusing attention upon Arbus, I have been propelled in part by the anomaly which she, as a woman, presented within the fraternal club of late-sixties art photography, and the difficulties this breach posed in terms of its gender-specific formulations of genius, auteurship and authorship. And yet an understanding of these operations must move beyond the aesthetic placement of Arbus to the motivations which allowed for such discursive constructions to manifest themselves in particular ways. In shifting the terms of investigation onto a wider historiographic field, I hope to further emphasize the interpenetration and mutually constitutive character of photography, photographic criticism, and formations of canon and authorship with the social and political articulations which surround them.

The conditions of existence that admitted and

characterized the status and value of certain photographs during this period extended beyond the specific interests of critics, curators, or photographers. Despite Szarkowski's assertions to the contrary, these practitioners and their repertoire of appropriate practices and objects were not independent, but intimately tied to a much larger constellation of discursive production. In conjunction with these individuals were those institutions which legitimated and professionalized their own areas of competence: the art museum, the university, the art publication, the private gallery and the commodity market. These particular institutions were themselves undergoing significant alterations at this time; some becoming only just incorporated, while others being newly consolidated and articulated to other, attendant discursive productions.

Still other structures which had previously accommodated photographers were coming under demise. The American picture press which had once acted as a primary vehicle for photographers' work was almost entirely dismantled by the early 1970's. Life ended in 1972; Look in 1971; The Saturday Evening Post, 1969; This Week, 1969; American Weekly, 1963 and Coronet, 1961. Yet, even before its decline, the picture press was falling under the shift of a new aesthetic in photography: one wherein individual expression and private vision superseded the uniformity of a photo-essay supposedly devoid of authorial command.

To return to the institutional arbitrament of MoMA

momentarily, this refusal of the editorial control required by the picture press finds its analogy within the reserved enthusiasm photographers awarded the Edward Steichen's 1955 exhibit The Family of Man. While meeting with support on the part of the public, photographers, according to Steichen's successor Szarkowski, "were distressed that the individual character of their own work had been sacrificed to the requirements of a consistent texture for the huge tapestry of the exhibition" (1978: 16-17). In keeping with the dramatic devices of large-format photo-journalism, Steichen's exhibitions emphasized the mass-imagery of photography, wherein the individual photographer was obscured by the instrumental demands of a grander, thematic unity. As Christopher Phillips writes, "This slippage of the photographer from the status of autonomous artist to that of illustrator of (another's) ideas marked the entire range of Steichen's exhibitions at MoMa" (1982: 48). While Beaumont Newhall was intent upon building photography as an independent, "fine art", with its adjunct constructions of the photographer as autonomous artist and the print as authorial expression, Steichen abdicated the prestige accorded personal vision for a policy which placed the museum as the predominant "orchestrator of meaning" (ibid.). With Szarkowski, the distribution of emphases fell partly back onto an opposite side. The authorship of a photographer was to be again forefronted in the re-



aestheticized constructions of photography in the sixties.

Connected to this privilege of authorship, and equally implicated within the historical conditions for photography and photographic criticism at this time was the development of a market for photography as a fine art. (The first successful commercial gallery for photography, the Witkin Gallery in New York, opened in 1969). While the entrance of art photography into the marketplace cannot be positioned as a determinate origin from which other discourses of photography stemmed, it may be considered as one conjunctural location from which to trace other contingencies of value and meaning involved in this assemblage.

In the late sixties, the semiotic status and the market value of art photographs became even more closely related, and this articulation distinctly abridged with other, inter-related discursive constructions surrounding photographic representation. Insofar as its effectivity was germane to the appraisals of canon, it can be related to the appropriation of a modernist theory which again allowed photography to constitute itself as an 'art' independent of all others, with its own ontological conditions and historical pedigrees. This also facilitated the placement of a photographic corpus within the pedagogical structures of art history, primarily through the insertion and adaptation of photography to the art history curricula of universities. Furthermore, this historical moment saw the

entrance of new players onto the institutional field of art photography: not only dealers and collectors, but scholars who would guide the former by underwriting and supporting the modernist theorization and art-historization of photography. The museums, perhaps foremost, implemented and interacted with this discursive production, adding to their collections while adding to the evaluative criteria of what should be collected. In this way, the collaborative efforts of scholarship and commerce intensified the reciprocal congratulations which were necessary for the survival of all involved.

Throughout its history, photography has been involved in an ongoing effort to reinvent itself as an 'art', while distinguishing itself apart from all others. Due to the mechanical nature of its techniques of reproduction and its collusive history with the relations of commerce, such feats of self-legitimation and definition have been difficult. In effect, it has required the proponents of 'art photography' to emphasize the mass reproductive capabilities which constitute photography's difference from other forms of representation, while voicing disdain for the commerce this different form of reproduction sustains.<sup>(2)</sup> In a similar manner, the revisionist history being written for photography during the sixties, and which precisely reinscribed its status as a commodity, worked through that differentiation between those who practiced its craft for

instrumental or commercial purposes, and those involved in finer, 'artistic' pursuits. In effect, this anticommercialist discourse became especially important to art photography in the sixties, due, contradictorily, to the new commercial and curatorial market created for it. Thus in a catalogue accompanying a 1969 exhibition, the curator of photography for the National Gallery of Canada writes:

Our newspapers, magazines and television bombard us daily with the photograph in the guise of illustrator and huckster, with the result that we become confused about the nature of the photograph and we lose sight of its potential ... [T]o limit the role of the photograph to an information or narrative medium is to ignore a great force indeed. Within the limited means of a young collection (The National Gallery of Canada began acquiring photographs in April 1967) the exhibition explores this other potential, i.e. the photograph as expression rather than description. As an expressive medium the photograph has followed two principle paths, the more obvious one being the product of a consciously artistic process and the less obvious one that of a documentary activity (Borcoman, 1970: n.p.).

Explicit in this document are many of the discursive supports required by a marketable/modern 'art photography': the signifying opposition of the commercial hack and the expressive artist and the corresponding distinction made between the photographic functions of description and expression; the National Gallery's self-conscious membership into the collector's club ('its a rather new collection, but it is a collection, and it does encompass most of the (3) pedigreed individuals the canon'); and the two, well-trodden, 'principle paths' by which the gallery directs the recognition of 'potential' - "a consciously artistic process

and a documentary activity". Each, as ingredients in an assemblage, contributes to the status and value of an independent and modernist (and commodified) art of photography.

One interesting factor concerning art photography's (and art photographers') hostility towards the commercial practitioner during this period was the fulcrum of contradiction upon which it balanced and from which it gained its strength. Enunciated primarily in terms of the economic dependence and exploitation to which the commercial/journalistic photographer was beholden, this hostile distinction paradoxically fueled not only the 'artistic', but economic value of the art photography from/for which it spoke. The art photographer was independent, and thus, independently wealthy. The photograph's worth was dependent upon how it could be rhetorically made autonomous from the demands of commodity culture; constructed, in effect as private property. In keeping with the traditions of the elite class which were its patrons, some considered it vulgar to mention money in connection with the art photograph. As a Fortune magazine article entitled "Investors in the Camera Masterpieces" wrote of the collector Arnold H. Crane, (estimated at that time to have owned "the largest collection of rare photographs in private hands"):

He stores the collection in vaults at Chicago's American National Bank. The 1840's daguerreotype portrait of Edgar Allan Poe is said to have cost him

\$35,000, but Crane will not discuss prices (1976: 12).

In order for a photograph to be worthy of collection, its value must be located elsewhere; outside of any monetary or instrumental determinations. Unlike the commercial hack, whose terms of production are dictated from above, the art photographer is positioned as not only economically, but aesthetically independent. And whereas the commercial photographer is cast as a nameless functionary, allowed to figure only incidentally, it is the authorship of the art photographer which signals his or her fortuitous potential. In order to acquire value, the photograph must be inscribed with a subjectivity. Ceasing to be the product of a machine, it becomes the creation of an independent intellect. The photographer is no longer just a worker in the service of a mechanical device, but an artist in full control of his or her industry.

This notion of the sovereign subject became extremely important for the extrapolation of an art of photography from its more functional/commercial purposes. Appropriated in part from the modernist theory of Clement Greenberg, (wherein the artist expresses the 'historical essence of civilization' only and exclusively through the 'purely visual'), the absolute subject acted as the lynchpin for not only the status of the photograph as art, but as commodity. Once the photograph is located as an original artifact of a singular, subjective vision, (a vision which transcends the banalities of human existence), it also may be removed from

the material and historical specificities, (including economic and ideological interests), which produced the work. As the privatized and autonomous product of a subject's own and originating self, the photograph is legitimated on its own terms, and it travels far.

In keeping with the attribution of the photograph as an independent object needing no further explication, photographers themselves were positioned above the need for accountability. Echoing the refusal of the wealthy patron to explain the occasion of a photograph's value, photographers also, for the most part, refused to talk of the motivating interests which sustained their practice. When asked to verbalize and expand upon the social commentary presumed to be in his photographs, Lee Friedlander answered, "I was taught that one picture was worth a thousand words, weren't you?" (Friends of Photography, 1972: 10). Two years later he repeated this posture: "The pleasures of good photographs are the pleasures of good photographs, whatever their makeup" (Green, 1974: 111). For Duane Michels, this mystificatory discourse was enunciated in the hippie individualism of the day: "You are the trip" (Afterimage, 1975: 3). And Gary Winogrand, much to the exasperation of his interviewer, bluntly stated, "I don't have anything to say in any picture" (Orovan, 1966: 21). While maintaining both the sovereignty of the photographer and the photograph, these

statements of refusal also protect the very discursive formation upon which the value of the photograph as autonomous and indeterminate object rests. In framing one's photographs, and one's self, as unaccountable and inexplicable, the photographer may evade any unwanted factors which might interrupt or violate their status and value. And in a like manner, the discourse of mysticism and ineffability which is invoked and which supports and secures this approbation is itself protected.

The emotional and material detachment which was emphasized with this theory also allowed all sorts of photographs to be requisitioned from the ash-heaps of history and repositioned as valuable and original masterpieces. By 1975, the collection of photographs by museums and private individuals had become of such notice as to warrant a symposium in New York City, bringing together "the stars of the field"<sup>(4)</sup> and prompting one invited curator to proclaim, "I'm here to tell you that I have found photography and I am saved"<sup>(5)</sup> (Hagan, 1975: 2). Organized by the magazine Art in America, the conference marked not only one of the magazine's first (self-publicized) ventures into photography, but also a particular moment of crisis.

Enunciated in terms of artifact, the value of a photograph turned upon the measure of singularity. As Beaumont Newhall stated, "The primary purpose of an exhibition is to let us see originals" (1970, reprinted in Afterimage, Nov., 1975). And yet, if in fact it is the

discursive creation of scarcity or originality which enables the worth of a photographic print, then how do the proponents of this discourse reconcile the mechanical replication of the medium? While photography's mechanical reproduction offered curators much to choose from, and distinguished its singularity and difference from other forms of representation, it also posed inherent contradictions and difficulties in constituting its value within the terms of authenticity and autonomy; within precisely those discursive creations which allowed it value as an 'independent' art in the first place. In most respects, this crisis was dealt with within the same discursive boundaries which troubled it; matched only by further exercises of the same hermetic impulse.

Thus Fortune magazine assures the potential buyer that "The artistry - and the drudgery - involved in making outstanding prints serves to protect their price:

Because negatives can generally be used over and over again, there would seem to be a continuing risk that more prints of a particular photograph might come on the market. But as a rule, there is little real danger of that. Prints produced by the person who took the picture (or, second best, were made under his direct supervision) are the most valuable. Since most creative photographers dislike the darkroom tedium - and have a keen desire to keep up the value of their output - the number of prints made from any one negative tends to be severely limited (1976: 10).

Value here is still attached foremost to the authorial subject: "the person who took the picture". It finds its correlate, as Annette Michelson has argued, "in the



obsessive insistence upon the privileged status of the dark room as the locus, within the productive chain, of 'the creative process', as the ultimate origin of subjectivity and value within photographic production" (1983: 16). In the mutual affirmation of photographer and photographic print, each enables the singular worth of the photograph. As a "final object, the original print" (Borcoman, 1970: n.p.) acts as evidence of a concealed self and traces the unseen labor of a physical presence. The paramount quality here, to re-invoke Avedon, is 'mystery': the mystical vision of the photographer and the mysterious space of the dark room (neither of which are normally seen by the spectator). As the guarantor of originality and authenticity, it is the artist/photographer and his/her private spaces of expression which sustains value. As the Fortune article assures, "it is the mind and eye of the person behind the camera that creates a great negative" (1976: 12).

As a component to the singularity of subjective expression, eccentricity is a characteristic which also, in a particularly gendered way, contributes to value. While this quality could be invoked in order to allow, or excuse, the unaccountability of photographers, (as previously remarked upon), it was more often used during this same period to allow, or excuse, the inclusion of women into canon. Julia Margaret Cameron is thus described as being "unconventional to the point of being eccentric" (op cit.).

Similarly, Arbus was elevated into the canon of troubled women artists. Death, of course, adds to both the mythology of mad genius and the further resurrection of immortal value. Such a tradition allowed Alan Levy to prophetically write of Arbus:

Not long before she died she said: 'Lately I've been struck with how I really love what you can't see in a photograph. An actual physical darkness. And its very thrilling for me to see darkness again' (1973: 81).

Both madness and death, as indescribable acts, contribute to the validity and worth of the photographer's expressive production. While the impulses which fire a 'personal vision' are hidden, (the mystery of these workings adding to the ideological investment of 'authorship'), death releases them from this 'darkness' into not only a public epistemology, but a public economy of scarcity (further adding to their value). Thus while Fortune magazine writes, with no sarcasm, of Walker Evans death in 1975: "Since then, in the best art-world tradition, the value of these negatives has multiplied" (1976: 12), Arbus's death brought more manifold effects, due precisely, as I shall argue later, to her gender. Of Arbus, Levy writes: "Barely a year after her death, Deeyan [sic] was no longer a person but a cult" (op cit.). In a most paradoxical way, it was those private, 'unimaginable', and unaccountable qualities of Arbus - her disturbing images/life and her uncommon death - which allowed her public elevation to 'cult value' and further anchored authoritative knowledge of her. Abigail

Solomon-Godeau has described this process in terms of the construction of canon:

Ineffability, we might say, becomes the fall-back position at those moments when the modernist paradigm appears inadequate as an explanation for subjective preference. Additionally, it points to the contradictory, but simultaneous, critical desires that the author and/or the work be enigmatic, yet also knowable - a discrete object of possession, knowledge and mastery. These two requirements are played out in the reciprocal and interrelated spheres of criticism and scholarship which together function to create the desired - the desirable - author (1986: 225).

In collusion with those aspects of canon which emphasize both the independence and the inheritances of a photographer, photography's modernist theorization occupied a tentative balance that stressed both the obscure and the recognizable. Differing from the 'high modernism' of Stieglitz and Newhall which rested upon an exclusionary formula of the photograph as the original artifact of a personal genius and an intentional artistic expression, the photographic modernism of the sixties extended beyond the traditional constraints of a 'high art'. In that no law can be prescribed for the workings of genius, originality becomes its only measure: in this sense, the originality of subjective expression. But for the collector and dealer in the late sixties, the transcendental imperatives of genius were becoming more difficult to secure. In the face of a proliferating market, it was proving more and more demanding to rescue originality and authenticity from the photographic object. The production of value, of originality, became to

require more than an author for the object. It also needed a knowledge not only transcendently, but empirically acquired.

In this sense, the photographic modernism of the sixties balanced upon a contradictory fulcrum which allowed not only the valorization of the photographer as authorial subject, but also the embrace of all sorts of photographs not normally or previously considered under the rubric of 'art'. Exempted from the burden of 'intentionality', and yet still endowed with a privileged, though unaccountable, vision, photographers were able to practice their work free from the responsibility of politics or history. Similarly blessed, older photographs could now also be removed from any instrumental or ideological realm which might have inhibited their entry into the world of commodity and art. Unaccountability on the part of the photograph and the photographer fit neatly into modernism's emphases upon the ambiguous and the independent. Just as the photograph becomes a 'thing-in-itself', so too do the practices of human beings need not be explained. In this way, the inexplicable could be used to neatly foreclose questions of modernism's institutional operations; to fill in the lacunae where the disturbing contradictions of history might take hold, and endanger the theory itself.

Still, the enigmatic could not be allowed too great a license. While history, with its dangerous repudiations and determinations, had been dispensed and emptied with the

modernist theory, the self-sufficiency of the photograph had to be appraised and comprehended within some degree of ontological and epistemological containment. Certain critical and analytical tools had to be provided in order that the photograph was properly known and interpreted within the dictates of modernism. As an object onto itself, the photograph had to be considered within a particular ontological framework. Certainly, under modernism, the photograph was a mutable object, but this mutability only rested upon what was understood to be somehow inherent in photography as a distinct cultural form.

While most historical analyses of photography in the late sixties and early seventies commonly attribute John Szarkowski as the progenitor of the formalist modernist theory for photography, its epistemological and ontological constructs could not have been proposed outside of that historical moment which restructured and restricted its conditions of existence. Evidenced in curator Weston Naef's argument that more scholarship was needed to distinguish "subtle differences in the nature and quality of pictures that will influence financial values" (Hagan, 1975: 2), again, it was the market for photography as a fine art which enabled and was enabled by the modernist theory. And as Christopher Phillips has shown (1982), no where has this collusion between the interests of aesthetic and commodity been so clearly discerned as in the early tenure of

Szarkowski at MoMa. But there were other factors which both allowed for and limited this relation of interdependence.

Szarkowski would have been unable to formulate his theorizations had it not been for the preceding constructs set out earlier at the MoMa by both Newhall and Steichen. While he "represented an aestheticizing reaction against Steichen's identification of photography with mass media" (Phillips, 1982: 53), he also borrowed from Steichen a universalizing formula that was capable of embracing any photograph; 'artistic' or journalistic. And while Szarkowski did not seek to repeat Newhall's efforts "to cordon off a 'high' photography more or less independent of the medium's everyday uses" (ibid.), he did commandeer the tenet of autonomy within this aesthetic in order to apply it, conversely, to the entire medium. Yet, contrary to Phillips' assertion that Szarkowski's claims for photography "resounded beyond the museum's walls to a rapidly proliferating network of galleries, collectors, critics and art administrators" (ibid.), I would argue his theorization did not necessarily permeate outward as the primary cause of effect, but was itself effected; by these same institutions and by the historical and political conditions which allowed for them.

In 1970, Beaumont Newhall described the critics's function as that of pedagogue or guide: "I submit that it is the duty of a critic to help us see" (1975: 14). Yet Szarkowski's claims for photography, as well as those voiced

by his contemporaries, were only mitigated in so far as they were themselves instructed by a series of social relations and configurations of knowledge. In fact, in producing the epistemology for this art of photography, critics and photographers reproduced those ideological relations which allowed for it. What was decreed at the level of the image and the author could only be derived from a larger assemblage of political processes which extended beyond the art institution, indeed, beyond the marketplace, but were nevertheless already in place.

What is interesting about photographic criticism during this period is that it seemingly takes its authority from within its own hermetic purview. Rather than reaching for other, sometimes anterior, theoretical constructs to verify and inform its powerful dictates of knowledge, (as more recent 'photographic theories' have), its legitimations appear confined within the boundaries of the art institution. Thus, one may be mistaken in believing that the modernist formulations for photography at this moment determined and was determined by solely those immediate concerns which it addressed.

Certainly, this belief is only furthered by the essential formalism which the aesthetic propagated. If we look to the conceptual structures which governed the production of this theoretical schema for photography, we see that they were based and built upon a notion of the

photograph as an essential and immutable object; outside of the reaches of history or political intervention. But if we are to ask: Where does this ontology come from? What founds its legitimacy and gives it validity?, then we are on a plane of different levels and registers of meaning production and knowledge which enable us to break down the theory's containment.

In order for this modernist theory to be fully operative across photography's boundaries of genre, it had to start with the recognition of the photograph as a specific ontological object. By ontological, I mean that which is believed to be constitutive of the photograph itself; that which it essentially is and which is implied in the very definition of the photograph as object. Enunciated in terms of photography's difference from other forms of representation, this ontology in turn demanded that unique methods of interpretation and standards of evaluation be set for photography. Once the ontology of the photograph is collectively recognized, then the ontology itself becomes the necessary condition for a common epistemological position.

What was said to set photography apart from other forms of reproduction was its mechanical origin, and it was this a priori or essential difference which posited photography as an ontologically contained entity. Premised upon the technological origins of photography's invention, this ontological distinction rested upon the peculiarity of the



medium, which allowed physical objects to imprint themselves directly upon the image. The claim could then be made that there were certain necessary connections between the photograph and the 'real' which it copied, thus guaranteeing photography a facticity or 'truthfulness' which other mediums were unable to attain. As Rudolph Arnheim articulated this distinction, photographs have "an authenticity from which painting is barred by birth" (1974: 155). With the photograph, "we are on vacation from artifice" (ibid.: 157).

Based upon this difference of mechanical reproduction, photography was ontologically sown to the actual or the original object. Its truth value was thus assured, and not only in regards to the presence of the object it depicted, but also to the presence of the subjective expression behind the camera. In this construction, both the photograph and the photographer were shackled to the original and essential nature of photography's mechanical process. In the 1966 catalogue for the MoMa exhibit "The Photographer's Eye", John Szarkowski makes the determinations of this essential distinction clear.

An artist is a man [sic] who seeks new structures in which to order and simplify his sense of the reality of life. For the artist photographer, much of his sense of reality (where his picture starts) and much of his sense of craft or structure (where his picture is completed) are anonymous and untraceable gifts from photography itself. ... Like an organism, photography was born whole (1966: 11).

In basing itself upon the historical instrumentality of

photography's origins, this ontology of the photograph allowed for the ahistory of the photograph itself. Photography "was born whole" and thus commences and concludes with every photograph. But the organicity of photography's mechanical process was itself split into two factions, which advanced not only certain notions of the photographic object, but the subject at the controls of the machine. As Szarkowski writes, photography finds its basis "not on synthesis, but selection ... the difference [is] a basic one. Paintings [are] made ... but photographs [are] taken" (1966:6).

There are two basic assumptions pertaining to the mechanical nature of the photographic process. One entails the view that there is a necessary and guaranteed correspondence between what is depicted by the photograph and what stood in front of the lens. While viewers may not have seen this object even if they had actually been present at the time and place of the photographic act, the photograph necessarily records an actual fact. The belief stressed here is that the photograph cannot lie. "The first thing that the photographer learned was that photography dealt with the actual; he had not only to accept this fact, but to treasure it; unless he did, photography would defeat him" (Szarkowski, *ibid.*: 8).

The other corresponding perspective of photography's mechanical process accents the supposed resemblance between

the optical systems of the camera and the human eye. This belief posits that the camera allows viewers to see what they would have seen, if only they had been there themselves. In this way, not only the camera, but the human eye behind the lens becomes the purveyor of truth in the photograph. "The photographer was tied to the facts of things, and it was his problem to force the facts to tell the truth" (Szarkowski, 1966: 8). Much like those presumptions underlining participant observation in ethnography, the key belief hinges upon the statement that "You are there because I was there". In this manner, it is not only the photograph (as an absolute and verifiable document), but the photographer (as an absolute and verifiable author) which insures the truthfulness of a photographic image. As Diane Arbus articulated this dynamic:

I really think that what it is [the photograph] is what it's about ... And what it's of is always more remarkable than what it is.

... it's very subtle and a little embarrassing for me, but I really believe there are things which nobody would see unless I photographed them (1972: 15).

In either model of the mechanics of the photographic process, it is the experiential moment which supports not only the authority of the camera's authenticity, but the human subject's as well. And while both take different approaches to the originality of the mechanical process, both entail the same semantic ends.

In locating the ontological distinction of photography within the decisive moment of its mechanical actions, the

modernist epistemology for photography could speak assuredly and authoritatively of not only photographs, but photographers. For while the origins of photography are located in that desire "to fix Nature", to present an exact copy of the real world as it is passing, a correlate aesthetic is appended to this realist compulsion. This aesthetic is also based upon a notion of origins; originating not only from the mechanical process of the camera, but from the selective vision of an individual whose photographic expressions correspond not only to the machine, but the machinations of a knowing and instinctive identity. Like the two ontological models of photography's mechanical process, these two epistemological constructs interweave one another; belonging, as they do, on the same Mobius strip. Implicit in each is the notion that the photograph's semantic properties are directly derived from the image itself; its meaning bound up in its status as either the document of an object or the testimony of an identity.

The ontological construction of photography thus becomes the starting point for a photographic epistemology and criticism. It supplies the foundation from which subsequent knowledges of the photograph embark. But in providing the devices which make this ontology of the photograph operational, the epistemology also allows for photography's critical enunciation. The strategic effects of each carries over onto the other. In this manner, the explanation of photography as the product of a desire to

capture or express the truth, can itself be seen as the desire for political or epistemological authority. To base a meaning upon an origin then, is already to have the meaning in mind.

In a book representing the MoMa's photographic collection in 1973, John Szarkowski wrote, "The focus of the Museum's concern is of course on the art of the twentieth century: in photography however, no arbitrary date can be set to represent the beginning of a modern era" (1973: 11). In invoking such an uncertain past and present for photography, Szarkowski was exactly summoning that ontological construct which allowed for the ahistorical recuperation of both old and new images. As a self-sufficient object, the photograph already is: there is no supplementary meaning to be gained from a concrete place or history. Yet the specificity of this ahistorical object still had to be indicated. Certain laws or boundaries were needed to mark off what is known or thinkable about the photograph. For Szarkowski and his contemporaries, this meant turning away from previous concerns with the content of the photograph, (which could disrupt the inclusive existence of the photograph) to emphasize an epistemology which was built upon a tripartite schema of representation, fiction and form.

Liberated from the sticky metaphysics of expressionism, with its transcendent affirmations of authorial intention,

meaning, emotion, and social metaphor, the reconstructed modernism for photography lay fully anchored to the camera's mechanical powers of description. Instead of underscoring the contents of a photograph as the result of a photographer's intention, the modernist formula stressed the mechanical constraints of optics, chemistry and framing as an inherent formal order from which the photographer cannot escape. "[A] photographer has at his disposal a system of visual indication that, even without his conscious deliberation, will describe the world with a unique, mimetic energy" (Papageorge, 1977: 15). But given the dual nature of photography's representational function - as an exact replica of objects or scenes, or as a replica of objects or scenes as someone else saw it - photography remained as tied to the illusions of vision as it did to the facts of reality. In this sense, the emphasis upon form did not exclude the fictionality of the photograph. As Gary Winogrand once described the photographs of Ansel Adams: "The photographs are about what is photographed, and how what is photographed is changed by being photographed and how things exist in photographs" (Papageorge, 1977: 17). But equally, Winogrand states, a photograph is "the illusion of a literal description of a piece of time and space" (ibid.: 15). In emphasizing the simultaneity of representation, fiction and form, this modernist epistemology allowed for the authorship of the photographer insofar as it pertained to the selection or vision of those formal descriptive

strategies intrinsic to the medium.

This realist and formalist position followed and yet strayed from Clement Greenberg's definition of Modernism as a self-referential art practice. In his 1961 essay, "Modernist Painting", Greenberg outlined four main tenets by a modernist art could be discerned: 1) the tradition of the practice; 2) the ways in which this practice is made distinct from other visual art practices; 3) the "cardinal norms" of the art practice; and 4) the materiality of the medium itself (Burgin, 1982: 208). I have already referred to the ways in which photographic modernism constructed both a "tradition" and a difference for an art of photography. As to the "cardinal norms" of this distinct art practice, Szarkowski is well known for outlining the essential formal elements of photography in his 1966 book, The Photographer's Eye. As Christopher Phillips has written of Szarkowski's 'list': "His five characteristics - the detail, the thing itself, time, the frame, and the vantage point - provided not only a checklist that could be held up to any photograph for the cool appraisal of its organizing logic, but also a range of stylistic alternatives that were explicitly regarded as "artist's choices" (1982: 57). This litany of form was still being invoked ten years later, as evidenced in photographer, critic and curator Tod Papageorge's examination of the photographs of Gary Winogrand. In speaking of Winogrand's photograph of Alexander Calder, he

wrote:

The meanings that a photograph contains cannot be stated, any more than we can say what a poem means by detaching a theme from it. ...

... we do not have to know who Calder is to feel the extraordinary tension in this picture: the frame is tilted and the old man's slightly lolling head seems to attract and bear the entire weight of the photograph. Around him we can trace a perfect arrangement - people splayed across the picture plane, gesturing, smiling, talking - a suspended cartwheel of form that owes nothing to a conventional idea of pictorial structure, but that as we scan it is full, satisfying and characteristic. Yet it is in the precision of this picture's details ... that we discover what the picture is 'about' and what it 'means' and with that begin to understand the specific gravity by which a camera can draw the most intractable of facts into a small system, a photograph that works.

The best poems are those with the right words in the right order; so are the best photographs those with the right objects in the right position (1977: 15).

Where this modernist theory for photography abstained from Greenberg's formulations was in the latter's insistence upon the role played by the material support in defining the medium. As Victor Burgin points out, "Greenberg insists on the materiality of the painted surface as a thing in itself in the interests of an anti-illusionism; to make a comparable insistence in respect to photography would be to undermine its founding attribute, that of illusion..." (1982: 209). To exempt illusion from the theorization of photography would be to strictly adhere to a realism which avowedly assumes the unmediated presence of the object in the image. It would occlude not only the camera, but the subject who took the picture. In the interests of authorship, this could not be allowed.

The tripartite schema of representation, fiction and



form pivoted upon a precarious rest wherein one element could not be allowed to outweigh the others. To fall entirely upon the side of form would be to allow a move towards abstraction, something which the modernist canon most pointedly ignored. To abandon photography's realistic powers of description would be to give up that particular ontology which allowed for the ahistorical recuperation of photographs. Form was considered only in so far as it related to the intrinsic facticity of the camera. Equally, the content of the photograph, what it realistically represented, was insignificant on its own. Evacuated from the specificities of history, it became only meaningful to the degree in which it was formalized by a pictorial method. As Szarkowski has explained it:

In this particular art [of photography], form and subject are defined simultaneously. Even more than in the traditional arts, the two are inextricably entangled. Indeed, they are probably the same thing. (1976: 7).

The interdependence of these elements emphasized both illusion and reality; resemblance and disassociation. Insisting simultaneously upon both the immediacy of photography's illusions (its reproductive fictions), and the self-determinations of the photograph (in reproducing 'the real'), photographic modernism did not seek to eliminate these contradictory axioms, but rather contained them within a reciprocal concealment. Ultimately, this subtle equilibrium converged upon the vanishing point of the

photographer as authorial subject. As the photographer Robert Adams has argued; "The photographer hopes, in brief, to discover a tension so exact that it is peace" (ibid.). As peace-maker, it was the photographer who orchestrated photography's magic act of illusion and reality, as it was the photographer who reaped the rewards of a history and a content made obsolete.

In her critical review of Lee Friedlander's photographs, Martha Rosler writes, "His conscious presence assaults the notion of transparency, breaking our experience of the moment photographed while at the same time alluding to it" (1975: 47). This tension of transparency and obscurity allows in effect the avoidance of any critical analysis into either the instrumentality of photography's representations or the selective vision of the photographer. Each, in effect, counteracts the other. The only thing left to fill up the gap left by this avoidance is ineffability. The politics, history, time and place of this cultural production are exhumed, and what is left to sight is the mythologized and mysterious subjectivity of the photographer. Such is Szarkowski's reification of William Eggleston:

A picture is after all only a picture, a concrete kind of fiction, not to be admitted as hard evidence or as the quantifiable data of social scientists.

As pictures however, these seem to me perfect: irreducible surrogates for the experiences they pretend to record, visual analogues for the quality of one life, collectively a paradigm of a private view, a view one would have thought ineffable, described here with clarity, fullness, and elegance (1976: 14).

As "surrogates for the experiences they pretend to record", photographs (like photographers) don't have to announce a serious intent about anything. Fiction and fact cancel each other out, leaving nothing behind but the self-contained space occupied by the photographer. The circular logic of this theory for photography thus functioned ultimately to install an artistic subject for photographic works of art. So too, of course, did the photographic practice which this theory explained.

Built upon fact, the subject-matter most widely elected was that which documented or made use of the urban landscape. The titles of exhibitions echo this preference: "New Documents", 1967; "Toward a Social Landscape", 1966; and "Twelve Photographers of the Social Landscape", 1966. Following the tradition of American "straight" and street photography, these photographs ranged from the studied formalism of Winogrand and Friedlander, to the more direct reportage of Arbus, Larry Clark, Danny Lyons, or Bruce Davidson. Yet the underlying assumptions of a modernist photographic theory was equally at practice in the work of each. Despite their inclusion in some form into the tradition of social documentation, and despite the clear, lucid and most often dramatic depictions of urban life, these photographs offered little by way of social commentary or political signification. As "illusions of literal descriptions", they acted only to mask the inequalities of

race, class, and physical appearance they described, while unveiling the presence of an artistic subject.

It is no accident that in this self-referential climate of modernism the snapshot was invoked as the metaphor for late sixties photography. Representing the subject matter of the quotidian, the snapshot "was spoken at street level in an urban world" (Green, 1984: 106).<sup>(6)</sup> It was considered fragmentary, non-narrative, ambiguous and sometimes, non-intentional. The snapshot could be viewed as having a special correspondence with the varieties and the vulgarities of urban life; assuming not only a more unmediated presence, but an unprofessional one. Its authenticity stemmed not only from its relations to what it depicted, but also from its relations with that particular class which utilized it. As Nathon Lyons writes in the catalogue for the exhibition, "Toward a Social Landscape":

For a number of years in lectures throughout the country, I have suggested the need for an evaluation of what might be considered authentic photographic forms. One which I have paid particular attention to, and which has undergone extensive research, has been the question of the 'snapshot'. What is generally implied is the state of picture awareness of the rank amateur. Interestingly enough, the snapshot's significance in modifying our attitude toward picture content and structure has been quite remarkable (1966: 4).

As a leisure technology that was easily affordable and thus "democratic", snapshot photography was seen as the great leveler; anyone could and did use it. And from this it drew its authenticity. But for Duane Michels, who has admitted that his photographs "are essentially snapshots",

the differences between the artist and the rank amateur are distinct. Thus Michels claims, "when a great photographer does infuse the snapshot with his personality and vision it can be transformed into something truly moving and beautiful" (Lyons, 1966: 5). At this point the equivalency stops. Snapshots become the great leveler of human differences only for those people who are depicted within them.

In the photographs of Winogrand or Friedlander, individuals are rendered equivalent: reduced to visual forms and removed from their corporality. Each person becomes interchangeable in an image in which hierarchies of social or cultural difference have been evacuated. Politics are overpowered by modernism's cancellation of fact and fiction. Screened through the theory's ideology of neutrality, what is left is smug indifference; primarily on the part of the photographer, but also on the part of the viewer. The photographs in Gary Winogrand's book Women are Beautiful (1975) all describe what looks, in the end, to be the same women, with the same breasts. But Gary Winogrand states, "I don't have anything to say with any photograph".

In the photographs of Davidson, Lyons, Clark or Arbus, this absence of commentary or moral efficacy is more difficult to discern. With their emphasis upon extreme types and situations, and their straightforward approach, they appear more anchored to the authentic witness and representative truths promised by the documentary tradition.

But these photographs, bound as they are to the modernist paradigm, also exhibit the isolationism of their makers. The subjects of these photographs - the poor, the addicted, the imprisoned, the maimed, the 'freaks', - are ultimately depicted not for their own representation, but for another class which is absent - and yet the only one present: the artist. In aiming the camera consistently downwards, - or, in the obverse production of a cult of celebrity, upwards (Sekula, 1989: 59) - these photographs typify modernism's segregation of type. Yet under the guise of a liberal pluralism, an ideology of "separate yet same" is at work; allowing the photographer to act as patronizing stand-in or representative for a class which is not allowed to represent themselves. Just as the snapshot was appropriated in the interests of a formalist aesthetic, the subjects represented in these snapshot-like frames are appropriated and formalized in the interests of artistic self-reference.

Freaks was a thing I photographed alot. It was one of the first things I photographed and it had a terrific kind of excitement for me. I just used to adore them. I still do adore some of them. I don't quite mean they're my best friends but they make me feel a mixture of shame and awe. ... Freaks were born with their trauma. They've already passed their test in life. They're aristocrats (Arbus, 1972: 3).

Bearing all the marks of a colonial ethnography, this photography catered to the 'freakish' tastes of the sixties; showing off the results of a risky encounter with difference. Simultaneously, like all good ethnography of this type, it proclaimed a fraternity with those it

disenfranchised. While celebrating the privileges of trauma with the altruism of liberal pluralism, (freaks, after all, were the true 'aristocrats'), those who actually benefited from this image were its creators. It is crucial in this respect that while these photographs document 'subcultures', they avoid the representation of subcultural conflict. To allow the later would be to revoke the photographer's prerogative of immunity from the politics of representation. 'Slumming it' does not require involvement.

As a predominant ideology of the sixties, (and beyond), liberal pluralism acknowledged while it contained the heterogeneous dissents of the Vietnam War, and the Black, Chicano, Amerindian, Women's and Gay movements. In a like manner, art photographers worked within a practice of exposure and concealment which ultimately reinforced an ideology of authorship. Denying the imposition of intent, meaning and emotion, photographers appeared to refute the very means of authorship while resting upon its status. Self-contained within a construct of distanced contemplation, allusiveness, and individualistic autonomy, photographers refused to participate in an act of judgment. It was left to critics to enunciate this subjectivity.

As public representatives for the art of photography, critics may be seen as enjoying an empowered singularity in their capacity to name and explain an artist and a work. In line with a commonly assumed binarism, it would be easy to

define the critic as the progenitor of judgment and reason; supplying a voice to the silence occupied by the image and the photographer. But critics, at this time as in subsequent others, were neither the subalterns nor the commanders of the photographic regiment.

Bound to a greater conjuncture of theory, publication, exhibition, market, pedagogy and practice, the critic stands as one constituent within the discursive apparatus for an art of photography. Each member of the apparatus crosses and maintains the other in a productive assemblage. Paradoxically then, one aspect of this production is the mythicization of the critic's objectivity. As intellectual apologist for the theoretical status of the art photograph, the critic's autonomy must be kept absolute.

This separation - between artist and critic, between theory and practice - was one of the most intrinsic supports for the discourse of photographic modernism. Yet, in practice, there could be no explicit hierarchy or critical schism, because to allow such disunity would be to endanger the whole of the apparatus itself. Ceasing to be 'common-sense', the theory would draw attention to itself and hence its contradictions. The function of criticism in this sense worked more to conceal rather than reveal, in a participatory effort to keep the machinery and the market of art photography running.

In this respect, it is neither surprising nor expected that many critics at this time were also photographers. Tod



Papageorge, Nathan Lyons, and John Szarkowski at one point, were practitioners as well as curators and critics. Much 'criticism' tended to be the writings of curators/critics whose evaluations of photographs were directly linked to a sponsorial role. Moreover, given the discursive assemblage within which critics were entangled, there was also an implicit assumption at work that one needed to know the medium in order to understand and explain the work.<sup>(7)</sup> At this time, as in the present, critics worked with a nepotistic purview which secured the canonization of certain photographers.

In part, the existence of the critic/photographer pertains to the concrete restrictions facing the practice of photographic criticism at this time. The survey guide Photography: Source and Resource for the year 1973 listed only 30 writers whose work could loosely fall within the discipline 'photographic criticism' (Coleman, 1979: 209). Most writing took place within large circulation photographic monthlies, such as Popular Photography, Modern Photography, or Camera 35. Directed to the male, amateur photographer and funded by the large scale ad revenues of the photographic industry, the majority of these writings (by male photographers) were recognized as exercises in personal sensibility or equipment choice, and thus largely discredited as "serious critical organs" (ibid.: 211).

A few popular art magazines, such as Art in America or

Artforum gave limited and sporadic space to writings on

(8)

photography. On the whole, much of the criticism found in these magazines was of a laudable nature. There seemed to be little need to argue with success. In fact, there was little by way of a critical intervention into a photograph's images. Rather, the images were taken as the object from which to speak of the photographer as an ambivalent and independent authorial subject. As Jain Kelly writes of Lee Friedlander in Art in America: "In 'Self Portrait' he shows something of the life-style of the photographer, even to the peripatetic and lonely aspects of many commercial photographers' existence, and presents something of his ambivalence toward himself as an artist and his relationship to other human beings" (1972: 86).

Working in line with modernism's tenet of ambiguity, critics very often adopted the highly allusive vocabulary of the photographer. As a formal object which was considered 'fragmentary, elliptical, ephemeral and provisional' (Szarkowski, 1976: 8), photography's similarity with poetry was repeatedly stressed (Bocorman, 1971; Lyons, 1966). In many respects, critics reproduced this poetic indeterminacy in their own writings as a means to reinforce modernism's theoretical construct of the photograph as an independent and enigmatic object. Similarly, the authorial subjectivity of the photographer was reinstated through the romanticized prose of the critic. This had the double effect of concealing both photograph and photographer from any

contradictory evidence which might disrupt the authority of each. The use of an affective voice thus fundamentally reinstates the assumptions underlying the modernist discourse. In such a manner, James Bocorman appears to deliberately emphasize the avoidance of clarity in Nathan Lyons work, while reproducing this obscurity in his own writing.

... he creates allusions so complex and subtle, so frightening in their implications, that words dare not trespass. Using poetic artifice, he contrasts periods of turbulence with periods of calm, mystery with clarity, dark with light. After his usual full and somber space, we come upon blank white skies and the sudden freedom of open spaces in a passage of photographs of man-made horizons. It is a needed release from the intensity of his vision (1971: 5).

As the autonomous artistic subject was constructed within a dynamic of the ineffable and the recognizable, the critic's task was not only to buttress the obscurity of the photographer, but also to clarify and exonerate the practices of this exclusive individual. In some instances, formalism was invoked as an end in itself, as in Papageorge's vindication of Winogrand's discourteous photograph of Alexander Calder. The "lolling head" of this "old man" functions as nothing more than the center-piece in a "perfect arrangement" of form. The "old man" in fact, matters little. Other critics would prefer to summon a sensitivity in order to will away the inequities of a photographer's practice. Thus Jonathon Green writes of Winogrand:

In his desire for transparency and his antipathy to the 'arty', Winogrand necessarily deals in real-life meanings. His work is constantly in danger of having, in his own words, the "content overwhelm the form" (1984: 105).

In his "antipathy to the arty", Winogrand is disassociated from the influences of style and institution. Similarly, "real-life meanings" are acknowledged and yet carefully held at bay. His self-determination is thus left intact.

The construction of artistic subjectivity for Diane Arbus took another tack. While her male colleagues were abstracted as distanced, singular and self-contained, Arbus was discursively constituted within the processes of gender. In this respect, John Szarkowski characterizes Arbus in a manner which is quite distinct from his descriptions of other, male photographers:

She valued psychological above formal precision, private above social realities, the permanent and the prototypical above the ephemeral and the accidental, and courage above subtlety...

She was interested [in people] for what they were most specifically: not representatives of philosophical positions or lifestyles or physiological types, but unique mysteries. Her subjects surely perceived this, and revealed themselves without reserve, confident that they were not being used as conscripts to serve an exterior issue. They were doubtless also interested in her. At times it may have been unclear which was the mariner and which was the wedding guest (1973: 206).

In addition to the attempt to exonerate Arbus from the cruelties of her photographs, what is most evident here is Szarkowski's gendered construction of Arbus as a woman acting in the service of others, rather than guided by her own, individual volition. In this respect, despite whether

or not Arbus's subjects are 'used as conscripts for an exterior issue', Arbus most certainly is. While the subjectivities of Winogrand or Friedlander are presented as undivided and whole - both origin and agent of their actions - Arbus's subjectivity is only partial - given over to determinations not of her own making. As a semi-individual, Arbus's artistic subjectivity is seen as being guided by something over and beyond her self: in this case, her subject matter. In Arbus's photographs, subject and author collide to the point that it becomes unclear 'who is the mariner and who is the wedding guest'. Denied the individualism and formalistic values of men, the subjectivity of Arbus is defined elsewhere.

It is this construction which also allows Susan Sontag to ultimately reduce Arbus's photographs to the determinations of her biography. Coming from "a verbally skilled, compulsively health-minded, indignation-prone, well-to-do Jewish family ... " "Arbus's interest in freaks expresses a desire to violate her own innocence, to undermine her sense of being privileged, to vent her frustration at being safe" (Sontag, 1977: 43). As the product of a 'not-quite-full' individual, Arbus's work was driven, not by the impulses of a singular identity, but familial, class, and masochistic pressures.

Bound to an ideology which associates artistic achievement with the subjectivities of men, these writers

clearly have trouble seeing talented women as anything but freaks of nature. While an isolated individuality was deemed aesthetically significant, Arbus's individuality could only be explained as the isolations of madness. The post-humous investment of 'genius' rested precisely upon Arbus due to her romanticized ineffability; those indescribable and unknowable factors which lead to her uncommon demise. In this respect, Arbus only achieved singularity with her death.

By the mid-seventies, critics (including Sontag) were increasingly calling attention to the weak spots in the discursive facade of modernism. Demonstrating the futility of a theoretical construct built upon ideals of art as independent, ahistorical and apolitical, these writers worked to undermine the theory's pretensions to artistic autonomy and laid bare its political strategies. However, modernism has left a legacy that runs deep within the immediate history of photography. Social, ideological and theoretical change has largely signaled the demise of this theoretical practice, but it exists still within the interstices of these changes themselves. In this respect, the end of this modernist theory for photography does not necessarily mean an end to the discursive constructs of a gendered bias in practices and theories of photography; the reification of an individual artist or an individual critic; or the autonomy of a photograph or a written text. The collective productivity of this assemblage still continues

to shadow the practices of theoreticians and practitioners  
of photography.

## Footnotes

1. The strategies of street photography also appropriate the metaphors of combat to describe its methods of practice. A photographer could either "lie in wait" for the subject to appear, or eventually capture the subject through a "rapid fire" approach.

2. In terms of modern American Photography, Beaumont Newhall was perhaps the first to outline the method whereby photography was to be distinguished as an independent 'art'. This difference was enunciated in terms of both photography's technical process - which isolated its aesthetic factors from all others - and the personal expression of the photographer - which tempered the charge that photography was a purely mechanical practice.

"In order that ... criticism of photography should be valid, photography should be examined in terms of the optical and chemical laws that govern its production" (Newhall, 1937: 41, in Phillips, 1982: 34).

And, "Each print is an original expression" (Newhall, 1940-41: 5, in Phillips, 1982: 37).

3. The Photograph as Object: 1943-69. The photographs in this exhibition, all from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada and organized by the later for the Art Gallery of Ontario, were circulated by the AGO during 1969-1970. Following what Christopher Phillips has termed the "narrow genetic-biographical path" (1982: 54), the 49 photographers represented in this exhibition encompassed primarily the requisite litany of "great historical masters" with approved contemporary photographers thrown in. Of the 49, the majority were American; four were Canadian and six (including one Canadian) were women.

4. The "stars of the field" included Weston Naef, assistant curator for New York's Metropolitan Museum; Peter C. Bunnell, associate professor at Princeton University and director of the Art Museum there; Nathan Lyons, director of the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, N.Y., and a photographer; John Szarkowski, director of MoMa's Department of Photography; E. John Bullard, director of the New Orleans Museum of Art; Sam Wagstaff, former curator of the Detroit Institute of the Arts, and soon to be a major collector; Harry Lunn, dealer and director for the Lunn Gallery in Washington, D.C.; and Alex Russoniello, photographer and representative of the Witkin Gallery in New York.

5. The "newly converted" was E. John Bullard, director of the New Orleans Museum of Art. Like many other museum



curators who had only recently begun acquiring photographs, Bullard had discovered you could get more bang for your buck with a photographic collection. "We have a \$150,000 a year budget for acquisitions, and the question was, how to get the most out of it. We could buy one or two good paintings, or we could establish a really thorough and important collection" (Hagan, 1975: 2).

6. Jonathon Green's book, American Photography: A Critical History, is informative for its detailed account of the theoretical and practical determinations within modern American photography. But, despite the book's publication in the mid-eighties, it follows Modernism's history with an almost exclusively laudatory approach. In this respect, it does not critically detract from Modernism's self-referential approbations, but rather describes the history as it was received from the theory itself.

7. A.D. Coleman, "Two Conferences on Photographic Criticism: A Report and A Proposal", Afterimage, Nov. 1976, p.8.

"yet the lack of the feel of craft - the sensual involvement with materials and processes; the architectonics of perception, ideas and feelings generated by the limitations and possibilities of those materials and processes ... can also undercut severely the value of a body of criticism. That lack can narrow drastically the critic's range of awareness of a medium generally, as well as of given works within it, which in turn can limit the responsive potential of that large segment of the audience which looks to criticism for access and insight".

8. Critical journals specializing in photography such as Afterimage, did not, for the most part, come into being until the mid-seventies.

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## Chapter Two

### Objects Denied and Reinstated: Structuralism and Photographic Criticism in North America

In 1965, Albert Memmi's book The Colonizer and the Colonized was translated into English and published in New York. A year later, Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth was similarly made available to English-speaking audiences. Written against the continuing colonial presence of Western powers in Africa and Asia, both books revealed the violent and subtle forces which relegate colonized peoples into signifying positions for structural domination. While markedly different, both located the key strategies of colonialization as resting upon not simply coercive forces, but more pervasively and persuasively, the oppressive forces of representation. Furthermore, each, in different manners, outlined the ways in which the possession of other people and places by colonial regimes entails not only the production and reproduction of a divisive and racist 'reality', but also the disavowal and disguise of the fabricated nature of this 'reality'. In this respect, Memmi and Fanon held no illusions as to the neutrality or 'naturalness' of representation.

In 1972, Roland Barthes' Mythologies was translated into the English language. In this collection of essays, Barthes undertook the project of semiologically demystifying the quotidian 'collective representations' of bourgeois

society; "the social class which does not want to be named" (1972a: 138). In a now famous example, he wrote of the photographic depiction of a Black African soldier, arm posed in a military salute and eyes raised, "probably fixed upon a fold of the tricolour" (ibid.: 116). While acknowledging the literal denotation of the image, Barthes also digs deeper into its mythological (ideological) and delegative function. "But whether naively or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors" (ibid.).

On October 18, 1973, Susan Sontag began a series of articles for the New York Review of Books on photography. Each of these essays, (later published as the collection On Photography, 1977), inquired into the relationship between the production of meaning and the medium of photography. Each implicitly owed something of their ideological critique and analysis to the previous work of Barthes (1972a). In the first essay Sontag wrote, "To photograph people is to violate them ... to turn [them] into objects that can be symbolically possessed ... a soft murder, appropriate to a sad, frightened time" (1973: 61).

In foregrounding these textual instances, I do not want to imply any linear or causal relationship between them.

Nevertheless, in referring to them, I do want to allude to a certain historical and theoretical conjuncture: namely, to a certain moment in which representation was increasingly recognized as not only a 'practice of depiction, but one of delegation' (Mercer and Julian, 1988: 4). The conditions which allowed for this recognition entailed a complex of social, theoretical, and cultural relations: a complex from which neither cause, composition, nor effect can be reduced to any absolute determination. And yet this assemblage brought much to bear upon critical considerations of photographic representation. In particular, it signaled the conscription of a number of theoretical perspectives to the task of understanding and articulating the political activities of photographic signification. In examining this historical conjuncture as it pertained to photographic criticism, I want to trace out a quite momentous shift which had and continues to have much influence upon the theorization and critique of photography.

This shift entailed not only a displacement of critical, but geographical centers. Critically, it indicated the beginning of a departure from the formalist and exclusive apologias attending a modernist art photography, to a consideration of the "politics" of photographic representation. Geographically, it was corroborated by a move away from the commercial and curatorial center of New York City (MoMA; the Witkin Gallery) to the heretofore peripheral locales of California

and England (primarily located within academic institutions). And yet again, when speaking of abstract and physical movements, I don't mean to assert a clean detachment from the previous practices and players of a modernist photography and photographic criticism. Rather, I wish to consider this shift as made up of different "lines of tendential force" (Hall, 1986: 53), which articulated certain theoretical modes of analyses within particular historical and social formations. As Barthes wrote of the changing conceptions of "the work", it entailed a mutation that was "more in the nature of an epistemological slide than a real break" (1977: 155).

As this conjuncture continues in its effects, (the very nature of a slide being movement), I want to emphasize how the vital relations between social forces and ways of thinking about these social forces had a quite profound effect upon the reconceptualization of photography. In this respect, the dangers of divorcing theoretical constructs from the social, political and historical problematic from which their energies and directions are constituted and contained must be stressed. "You cannot understand an intellectual or artistic project without also understanding its formation; ... the relation between a project and a formation is always decisive " (Williams, 1989: 151). Following Williams, in examining this conjunctural moment, I wish to prioritize neither formal analysis nor social



formation, but rather the active interchange between the two.

The decade of the seventies for Anglo-American artistic production is often described in terms of a 'dead time'; a dormant period of waiting between the last 'best thing' and the next.<sup>(1)</sup> Within the annals of the art world, no major 'styles' are recalled, at least during the early to mid-seventies. It was a time of parenthesis, in which members of the art community understood that the rules of the game had changed, but were uncertain as to what direction.

But the early part of the seventies was also a time when the disparate political activisms of the previous decade were beginning to coalesce into certain operations of thought and action. More specifically, many of the political formations which emerged during the 1960's, (struggles which addressed issues of gender, sexuality, imperialism, race and class), began to deliberately assess the manners in which representation operated, particularly in regards to how the structuring of social relations colluded with visual representation. Certain constituencies of people, (women, Blacks, students), were gaining an understanding of, and access to, the operational procedures and conventions of language and representation. Quite simply, they understood language and representation differently, in that they were perhaps at a vantage point which allowed the 'self-evidence' of representation to be

seen more clearly. Language became more apparent as a medium - a means both of convention and intervention. This appreciation was complemented by a proliferation of new forms and new uses of visual communication, furthering the awareness of both the conventionality and dynamic arbitrariness of media. Moreover, the legacy of radical change within universities in the previous decade, which entailed breaks with traditional pedagogical practices and academic disciplines, also acted to alter received definitions of cultural production. As a conjunctural effect, this widening of the means of knowledge and representation also impacted upon an enlarging of photographic practices, practitioners and audiences. In this manner, the existence and strategic problems of these confrontation politics came to define the central issues for a new generation of theorists, and subsequently, for a new generation of cultural producers and critics.

New publications were to evolve which gave voice to debate and dissent from the orthodoxies of artistic and social discourse. Perhaps the earliest of such journals was Art and Language which started publication in Britain in May, 1969, and which informed much of the theoretical inquiry into the relations of language and cultural production. Later in England, the formation of the "Photography Workshop" by Jo Spence and Terry Dennett in 1974 was to play an important role in spurring both

alternative political photographic projects and publications. Instigated by the Workshop in late 1974, the socialist feminist Hackney Flashers Collective embarked upon a number of projects inquiring into women's work and the representation of women. The Half-Moon Photography Workshop also grew out of this same formation, as did the journal Camerawork. The Photography Workshop also published the text Photography/Politics: One, a collection of critical essays, in 1979. In New York City, The Fox began publication in 1975. Disagreements within the Artforum editorial group led to the formation of October in 1976. In early 1977, the feminist art journal Heresies also started publication in New York City under the directorship of a collective which included feminist art critics such as Lucy Lippard and Elizabeth Hess. In 1979, the journal Ten-8 started publication in Birmingham England. Also in 1979, the British journal Block began publication under the Art History Department at Middlesex Polytechnic in Hertfordshire.

As this last example illustrates, educational institutions also played a crucial role in supplying a basis for collective critical discourse. As the pedagogy of photography became steadily professionalized, more and more students were to gain graduate degrees in the practice and discipline of the medium. One consequence was that photographic pedagogy was to move from a pragmatic, vocational training, to a consideration of photography as a

cultural phenomena which provided students with a range of critical tools in order to develop an informed capacity for critique. Another consequence was the development of intellectual and critical networks which were to continue to the present. A case in point is Martha Rosler's graduate education at University of California in San Diego in the early seventies:

Around this time a number of us at school - some of us were faculty and some were students - realized that we considered ourselves political and that we needed to get together. We never managed to do any collaborative work, but we met regularly and supported each other, talking about ideas and work ... Fred Lonidier, Allan Sekula, Marge Dean, and Phil Steinmetz were some of the group's members. The group was very important to all of us (Rosler, 1981: 11).

This theorizing of representation thus entailed a strategic deliberation. Its impulse was a reconnection between theory and radical politics, which in turn enabled certain analytic efforts. The general thrust of this enterprise was to reinstate historical and social contexts into those isolated and privileged objects of visual representation previously bracketed off from history and ideology. In terms of photographic method, this relation was characterized by the application of the medium within practices which worked to un-anchor the photograph from the isolation of aesthetic or commercial discourses: Conceptual Art, Story Art, Photo and text, appropriated commercial imagery and multiple-image works. In terms of theorizing, it involved the employment of a congregation of analytic

strategies which inquired into and critiqued the constructed representation of social realities; namely marxism, structuralism, and semiotics. In terms of criticism, this connection allowed a move away from the established orthodoxies of New Criticism and the reverent exclusivities of Greenberg and Szarkowski, towards the gradual collapse and critique of the 'correct distance' which allows a 'neutral critical position'.

As argued, this conjuncture stems from a concern which addresses as much the place of photographic signification within the entire culture as well as the assignments of the photographic medium with artistic practice. And as previously stated, this concern evolved from an understanding of the delegative powers of photography; a recognition that photographic representation involves not only a supposed correspondence with appearances, but also a troubling capacity to 'speak for', or be representative of, a typified community of people and things. Concurrent with this recognition was the acknowledgment of the arbitrary and irreducible nature of signification; a realization that representation invents, modifies, and restructures the world. It followed then, that there could be no claim to an 'objective', 'pure', or isolated photographic practice. Rather, the claim of photography's capacity to somehow 'reflect' the world was begun to be understood as a fabrication of aesthetic (ideological) discourse. In sum, the 'innocence' of photography was increasingly refuted and

exposed. Similarly, the facile pretensions of photographic criticism to stand free of extrinsic determinations was also laid bare.

This change in perspective stemmed from the realization that 'reality' neither resides nor is reflected in things (photographs), but in the relationships we distinguish among things; not in objects but in structural arrangements. In this respect, the analytic methods lent by structuralism and semiotics came to be crucial for an understanding of photography's role in the construction of 'reality'. But while these methodological approaches were to have great impact in re-orientating the practices and perspectives of photography, their use and consequences were quite heterogeneous. The utilization of structuralism for the purposes of photographic criticism and practice in the United States and Canada was quite distinct from those related activities taking place across the Atlantic.

In citing the 1725 publication of Vico's The New Science as the first instance of a structuralist model of epistemology, writers who have offered accounts of the method have been concerned to locate its ancestry far away from the "sulphurous Parisian atmosphere of the [sixties]" (Hawkes, 1977: 11). The reasons for this concern are circumstantial: during the seventies in particular structuralism was to gain such widespread popularity as to become, so some felt, (e.g. Sturrock, 1979: 2), a fashionable

slogan wherein all historical and methodological specificity was lost and whose terminology served as mere intellectual garnish for a text. While this anxiety was partially founded, structuralism never entirely gave way to being an intellectual trend because, just as it was appended to certain philosophical 'movements', it was also a method; a way of approaching specific objects of inquiry rather than an all encompassing point of view. In many respects, the suspicions attending structuralism's approbation are similar to those which accompanied the arrival of theoretical perspectives on photography. And in many ways, the retorts to these attacks are similar in their justifications as well.

In terms of photographic practice, theory and criticism, the most important impact of structuralism was its rejection of the notion that the world consisted of fixed, unalterable and independent subjects and objects. In advocating the perspective that human beings construct the world as they perceive it, and in the process, are themselves constructed, structuralism undermined not only the notion of an apriori inherent reality of the world, but also the notion of a unitary, autonomous individual who is both source and agent of actions and meanings. Quite obviously, such assertions were to have great consequences for the humanist assumptions which both a liberal-pluralistic and modernist aesthetic for photography rested upon. In voicing the concept that the true nature of things

lies not within the things themselves, but in the relationships by which they are differently perceived and structured, structuralism was to offer strategies which disenfranchised the stable ontological object of the photograph and demystified the creative autonomy of the photographer.

Following the work of Ferdinand de Saussure ([1915],1974), the study of language as a system of signs was a key component to the early presuppositions of structuralism and semiotics. In terms of the functioning of relational frameworks, language stood as an exemplary example of a structure "whose constituent parts [had] no significance unless and until they were integrated within [the] bounds" of that structure (Hawkes,1977: 26). The very concepts a language expresses are also defined and determined by their arrangement within a composition. They exist, not independently as themselves, and not positively by their social content, but negatively, by their formal differing relations within the terms of the overall structure. There is then, no a priori meaning for individual concepts; in fact there is no meaning at all outside the terms set by the structure of language. And this meaning is gathered only on the strength of what the concept does not imply; its meaning is only created in a systematic arrangement of differences.

Because structuralism was seen to be applicable to all



systems of meaning, it became possible to extend the analysis of structural relations to all social and artistic practices. From the standpoint of linguistic science, or what is termed structuralist semiotics, photography was then entitled to be read as analogous to language. As Victor Burgin explains it, this perspective saw photography "as a self-contained entity whose capacity to mean was nevertheless dependent upon underlying formal structures common to all such works" (Burgin, 1986: 73). The application of the photograph within Conceptual Art stands as one early instance whereby these concerns of structuralism came into view. While predominantly 'North American', and with a much larger and longer history than I am prepared to sketch out here, Conceptual Art also supplied much of the basis for British inquiries into the structuring of language and image. In fact, many of the intellectual trajectories of contemporary photographic theorists (including Burgin) can be traced to this art practice.

But what is of primary interest in marking this historical moment is the way it precisely represents "the nature of an epistemological slide, rather than a real break"; a slide which carried continuities as well as change. In this respect, while the structuralist project taken up by Conceptual Art signifies that contradictory point when older patterns begin to come apart and new ones formed, it also illustrates the tenacity of past discourses and practices to remain embedded within the present. Such a

contradictory activity is one which is especially pronounced during the early stages of a theoretical and practical 'sea change'. There is a tendency, when first faced with a new perspective, to adopt that perspective statically; to condense the relationship between epistemology and politics without regard to the permutations of effects at a specific historical context. Such an abstraction often means that theoretical and methodological strategies, borrowed for particular political ends, lose touch with the the historical and political limits placed upon them. The loss of these limits may allow such methods to become convenient strategies for defusing potential controversies and challenges to the authorities of the practice and criticism which invokes them.

Consider then one essayist's description of structuralism contained within an exhibition catalogue on conceptual photography (Photography and Language, 1979). The definition in this essay, originally published in 1976, is as obtuse now as it was most likely was then. In a footnote, structuralism is explained as follows:

Structuralism is a study of art and philosophy that unites thought and action into a pragmatic reality that allows art and philosophy to co-exist on the same level (Lond,,1979: 69).

While this definition is sufficiently vague and unlimited, within the text proper it is given further explication:

Structuralism is a way to look at the diversity of

things, to examine component parts (as in language art, structural theatre, musical formalism), but also a reuniting of the parts discovered into more holistic understandings (Straussian anthropology, linguistics) - almost making structuralism a gestalt of formalism - everything is (ibid.).

My intention in citing this excerpt is not to solely refer to an objectionable obscurity, but also to point to how certain (objectionable) presences are absolved within this abtruse statement. Structuralism inherited a role placed upon it within a particular historical context; its conditions of possibility were allowed only by what was permissible within a certain moment in time. The appropriation of structuralism to certain tasks is itself then structured; limited to the horizons of past and present discourses. Furthermore, early structuralist semiotics, with its formalist emphasis - the assertion that language and art are self-contained - accommodated the continuing presence of realist and formalist constructs for photography: that which, in part and in theory, certain political versions of structuralism were committed to annul. The statement 'everything is', can also be extended to 'everything goes (on)'; an overarching system which allows the continuing presence of a conservative and reactive politics and imagery.

The exhibition from which this catalogue essay was included concentrates upon the combination of language with photographic imagery in order to critically divest the established social conventionality of each. As the

catalogue's editor Lew Thomas explains it, "Once linguistic structuring is integrated with photographic procedures, genres are subjected to reinterpretation and expansion" (ibid.: 6). Similarly, Thomas goes on to note that "Works implying feminist ideology have found an accessible methodology within photography and language to express their views" (ibid.). Indeed, the contributions of Nancy Gordon and Ricki Blau directly question received images of femininity. But, next to Blau's piece is Jack Butler's untitled work, in which the nude body of a woman is dissected into two parts: the top half (breasts) and the bottom half (crotch). These targeted signifiers of women's sex are underscored by bikini tan lines which accentuate the whitened breasts and crotch against a darker, and less significant part of the body. Underneath the upper photograph of breasts, Butler has written, "The pyramids are mammalian after all". Below the bottom photograph, which depicts a knife jutting from the bottom of the frame aimed directly at the vagina, Butler's text reads, "You know they only allowed men in the kiva". In contrast to the work of Gordon and Blau which playfully subvert the circulation of feminine stereotypes, Butler's offensive photographs and text cruelly play against women: the joke is on women and is one which firmly puts feminism in its place. What is confounding is not only the inclusion of Butler in this exhibition, but more so the crucial positioning of his work directly in between that of Gordon and Blau.

It is with these reservations in mind that I approach with some trepidation descriptions of conceptual art as an "affront to established values" (Burgin, 1986: 29). In an essay based upon his lectures given in 1974, and first published in 1975, Victor Burgin wrote, "One thing conceptual art has done, apart from underlining the central importance of theory, is to make the photograph an important tool of practice. The consequence of such moves has been to further render the categorical distinction between art and photography ill-founded and irrelevant" (1982: 39). While Burgin does not expand upon this point, he congratulates - not the elevation of the photograph to the status of art, (which, at any rate, had occurred beforehand) - but the use of photography by conceptual artists to blur the constructed distinctions between formally essential and immutable artistic objects (specifically, painting and sculpture).

Within Clement Greenberg's formulation for Modernism, great emphasis was placed upon what was deemed specific to a certain art practice: what set it apart in terms of the practice's 'cardinal norms', tradition, and the materiality of the medium itself. This construction of a completely autonomous sphere for art meant that art works were not only distinct from one another, but that they were independent from and somehow rode above, the more messy world of society and politics. And as recalled from the previous chapter,

such was a similar formulation adapted by John Szarkowski for the construction of a modernist art photograph.

With its insistence that the objects of cultural production are only entitled as such through the operations of signification, structuralism made visible the transparency of language which the status of the art object rested upon. In taking up this assertion, reviewers and practitioners of conceptual art turned away from the construction and contemplation of individual objects, to consider those conceptual structures which allowed the constitution of the art object in the first place. In an essay written for the catalogue accompanying a Montreal gallery's exhibition of conceptual photographic works, Chantal Pontbriand writes:

The object retreats in favor of the idea. The [photographic] image is not directly related to the real image as much as it is to the idea it supports (1974: 52).

Within the same catalogue, Paul Heyer more directly engages the methodologies of a Levi-Straussian structuralism to explain the concerns of the conceptual artist:

Structuralism contends that in signifying an object, an artist succeeds in creating a structure of signification in relation to the structure of that object...

Thus, what becomes revealed to us is the unsuspected arrangement or structural relationship of the object, act, or event...

If there is a lesson to be learned ... it must derive not from what the artist has made, but from the activity associated with the making (ibid.: 37-40).

In its attempts to exorcise the reified art object, conceptual art relied upon both the means of photography and

the methods of structuralism to complete its task. And yet the tools which it took up for this operation themselves carried certain tendencies which would counteract the stated intentions of conceptual art. What concerns me in particular is the ways in which the formalism of early structuralism also allowed the continuance of a formalistic and realist bent within artistic and photographic practice. Ironically, conceptualism's attempt to demystify the art object often resulted in a further privileging of the conceptual structures "created" by the artist and the artwork. Moreover, the use of photography as documentation for the conceptual act constructed the camera as, in the words of conceptual artist Douglas Heublar, "a dumb recording instrument" (in Morgan, 1981: 8). The presupposition, which is a realist one, rests upon the notion that there is a "real image" to record and that the camera is a neutral device of documentation. It is in these respects that conceptualism both broke with and reinstated the concerns of modernism.

In 1939, Greenberg wrote in his famous essay "Avant Garde and Kitsch":

Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself ... subject matter is to be avoided like the plague (1957: 105).

In this, Greenberg's formalism bears a resemblance to structuralist semiotics, wherein, as Terrance Hawkes explains it, "a concern with form must rank as one of the

central structuralist preoccupations" (1977: 59). As Saussurian semiotics has shown, the structural arrangement which makes words meaningful is both arbitrary and systematic. It is arbitrary because language is self-contained and self-justifying: there is no necessary correspondence between the word and a 'real' or natural thing to which it refers and makes meaningful. Split between signifier and signified, meaning only takes its cue from the arbitrary relations between the two. It is systematic because language acts as a conservative force within which all is encompassed within its purview. As Hawkes describes this circumscription; "we feel ourselves to be in the presence (and in the grip) of a firmly rooted and overriding system of relationships governed by general laws which determine the status of each and every individual item it contains" (ibid.: 24). In this respect, language, as all signifying systems, is pre-given and formal: it is seen as a structural combination of elements which exists without reference to any anterior 'real' force or motive outside of the 'reality' constructed by the system itself. Furthermore, this "overriding system of relationships" is discerned as transhistorical and transpersonal. Claude Levi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology asserted that the construction of 'reality' through a self-contained relational structure is a universal activity common to all human beings.



It seems then that structuralist semiotics also collided "content into form", in favor of an appreciation of an a priori formal structure. For structuralism, the apparent 'reality' and immediacy of the art object only acts to divert attention from and conceal the ahistorical, autonomous and formal construction which underlies and constitutes it. For a Greenbergian modernism, "subject matter was to be avoided like the plague" because it drew away from and had the capacity to interrupt or contradict the constructed ahistorical autonomy of the formal work of art. And such was a similar schemata developed by Szarkowski for a modernist art photography, with the important proviso that not only the 'subject matter', but the materiality of the photograph (for the contradictions its illusionary capacity might pose) was to be overlooked.

While I am drawing dangerously wide comparisons here, my point is that the early mechanistic theory of the structure of language was agreeable to the continuance of a modernist construct for photography because the two shared certain presuppositions. Early structuralist semiotics, (particularly that of Levi-Strauss and those based upon Saussurian linguistics), tended to reduce the active processes of structural relations to concentrate on the finished and formal product of the structure itself. In dealing with only the end-product, rather than the productivity of structures, these mechanistic perspectives were inclined towards substituting a notion of structure

for that of centre: a fixed origin which limited or directed the activity of a structure to produce fully-formed subjects and objects. As Rosalind Coward and John Ellis have pointed out (1977: 4), this "centre" carries the notion of a transcendent entity; something which is outside and a priori to the structure itself. Furthermore, the abandonment of the productivity of language structures for an emphasis upon their already constructed products resulted in a particular notion of the human subject. Human beings were only understood as either the simple 'users' of the already given products of language, or as those who actively 'intend' the meaning of language. In either event, human thought is said to pre-exist or be exterior to language as such. Such an understanding then, "returns us to the idealist premise of the individual belonging to the realm of the transcendent, beyond scientific analysis" (ibid.: 5). Moreover, this mechanistic perspective - which emphasized the end-results of meaning production rather than the activity of this production itself - views any human action which disturbs or changes a structure as mere "transgression". In these moments, the human being either ignorantly mis-uses or actively intends to create or confuse the neat system of language. As Coward and Ellis write, (in a complaint indicative of their own proposal for a materialist post-structuralism), such moments,

are treated as transgressions of an already constituted system, rather than as evidence of its

very process of constitution ... This structuralism thinks in terms of systematic oppositions between objects that are already fully constituted, held in a system of opposition that gains its internal balance and limits from a transcendent subject. The structuralist system relies on the sign having a real referent: the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified is established in this schema by a natural bond between the human mind and a real referent (ibid.: 22).

Such a relation of exteriority was also that which conceptualist photographic works maintained. And in this respect, conceptualism's utilization of structuralist theory and photography to break down "categorical distinctions" was not sufficient to banish either the realist ontological construct of the art photograph, or the reification of a unitary, creative individual. While conceptualism may have replaced the classic aesthetic question, "What is art?", with the structuralist question, "How is art made within what arrangement?", this shift from content to form or structure did little to disturb the formal, realist, and idealist frameworks governing the work of art or the artist. This is evidenced in an early definition of conceptual art, given here by the artist and "pure conceptualist", Sol le Witt:

In conceptual art, the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes art (1967: n.p.).

Yet lest one mistakenly perceive the artistic subject to disappear beneath this mechanical structure, le Witt reminds us who is behind the "machine". "Ideas", he writes,

"are discovered by intuition" (ibid.), and "intuition" here is clearly something which inhabits an area outside of the "machine". Some 14 years later, in a discussion of conceptual photography, the critic and art historian Robert C. Morgan would assert a similar notion: "Thus, for conceptualism, contrary to recent American formalism, the meaning of an image is not so much embedded within an object produced by an artist as it is determined through the content of the artist's ideas" (1981: 8). In emphasizing the artist's 'conceptual product' - that which pre-exists and is transcendent to the actual process of work - critics continued to uphold the privileged status of artistic subjectivity. Moreover, it was the artist's 'conceptual product' which became objectified and became 'property'. Bound within the confines of the installation, these works still remained within the official enclosures of a formalist and commodified aesthetic.

Photography was the medium of choice for conceptualism due to its banal and supposedly "neutral" properties. It was seen as being unobtrusive to what was considered important: namely, the artist's ideas. Furthermore, in the interests of conceptualism's supposed anti-modernist strategy - in which the materiality of the 3-dimensional art object stood as target - photography was considered an exemplary provision.

The physicality [of three-dimensional art] is its most obvious and expressive content ... Anything that calls

attention to and interests the viewer in this physicality is a deterrent to our understanding of the idea and is used as an expressive device. The conceptual artist would want to ameliorate this emphasis on materiality as much as possible ... This kind of art then should be stated with the most economy of means (le Witt, 1967: n.p.).

The notion advocated here - that of dematerialization - is an inversion of Greenberg's formulation for modern art. But, as it pertains to photography, it is an inversion with a twist, for it does nothing to disturb Szarkowski's demands for the validation of the art photograph. The presupposition of the conceptualists - that photography is somehow not material, or that its materiality didn't matter - continues with Szarkowski's requisite that the materiality of the photograph (ie: its illusionary characteristic) be overlooked. Similarly, the belief that the photograph served well as a neutral device to document conceptual works also stood in line with those realist assumptions which supported the distinction of a photographic art. Most importantly in this respect, was that the form of the sign - the signifier - was privileged against a consideration of the play or productivity of signifieds outside of the confines of this form. And finally, in that conceptualism's emphasis upon the structural relations of the art object were bound within the strictly formal purview of the art(ist), this limitation also allowed the maintenance of an apolitical formalist agenda for art photography. In sum, claims for the 'radical' nature of conceptual works extended only to the limits of 'art' itself. And riding with these

claims was the perseverance of discourses for art photography: the double mediation of realism and expressionism whose circular capacity cancels out intervention.

Conceptualism has been credited with making the photograph "an important tool of practice", and as the decade of the seventies wore on, photography indeed grew in visibility. In part, this visibility may be credited to later shifts in the use of photography within conceptual art: from document of the work to component of the work, thereby making the photograph more intrinsic to an overall function. (And yet, there was still little consideration as to photographic meaning outside of the conceptual schema or structure provided). More effectively, and appended to this change in use, was the economics of art and its impact upon photography. For just as conceptualism signaled the blurring of constructed distinctions between art works,<sup>(2)</sup> so too was the market to increasingly follow suit. Art dealers in the seventies were to seriously begin selling photographs, and photographic dealers began selling art works which incorporated the photograph. A consequence of this blurring of previously distinct markets and media was the rise in price and amenability of photographic works; now not just a 'document of art' nor a component of 'art', but, as ever, 'a work of art'.

In the introduction to a special issue on photography,

the editors of October remarked upon this change in the marketing of art and photography.

Earthworks, performance, cinema, video, all pose problems for the dealer insofar they infinitely expand and thereby revise the spatio-temporal donnees of commerce. Performance and video have now invaded Soho and the galleries of Western Europe as lively forms of enterprise, difficult to assimilate to the market structure. The solution seems to lie in the small, flat surface of the photograph with its equivocal and ambiguous temporal aspect, inflatable, of course, to painterly dimensions (1978: 4).

As its basis of authority rested upon the construction of the photograph as a distinct art object, photographic criticism persisted in extolling the independence and authenticity of the medium, against increasing assertions to the contrary. In defending its own turf, it also, by necessity, acted in collusion with the entire interdependent network upon which the modernist theorization was built, for each player in this apparatus was mutually dependent upon and constitutive of the other. There is irony in the fact that photography's success as a commodified artistic object evolved in part from an artistic practice (conceptualism) which refuted (in theory) the preciousness of the art object. But it is more ironic that photography's success in the market place was a crucial factor in forcing the re-evaluation of those terms of agreement upon which its very status as object relied. For the increased commodification and objectification of the photograph within the spectrum of 'the New York art world', also contradictorily engendered a particular anxiety about the loss of authenticity and

independence for photographic practitioners. In effect, the photograph's status as the original creation of an enigmatic and unique individual was undermined by those forces of commerce which precisely enabled its reification in the first place. And the critic's newfound presence and authority, based upon the terms of this difference, was also in danger of demise.

Consider then the photographic critic Shelly Rice's anxiety about the "cooptation" of an authentic community, which she sees as wrought by the economic and political demands of the art establishment:

It's intimidating to walk into an opening where everyone is over sixty and wearing mink, and photographers are justified in feeling coopted. From this point on, the creative individuals are only the grist for the economic mill. Collectors and potential collectors are now the stars of the show, and they are becoming increasingly influential as tastemakers within the field (1978: 4).

Rice's article, (entitled "New York: What Price Glory"), is interesting for the ways it signals a growing disillusionment with that very foundation which allowed a market for art photography and photographic criticism. In this respect, she re-enacts the traditional pose of critics to affect contempt for the market they sustain, and which sustains them. But what lies beneath her complaint is the elitist consternation that the critic's role as 'tastemaker' and ward of "creative individuals" is being superseded by unqualified and vulgar collectors.

As a recently validated epistemological production,



photographic criticism also stood to lose much with the import of alternative theoretical perspectives of the photograph. In most respects, photographic criticism tenaciously clung to the speciality of the photographic object created under modernism. Similarly, it was reticent to give up the construction of subjectivity which complimented this object. The defense of this edifice against the trespass of competing perspectives was extremely important. A case in point is the reception given Susan Sontag's book On Photography by the photographer and historian Micheal Lesy. In stating that Sontag's book is "based upon second-hand reports, brought by a messenger from the outside world" (1978: 5), Lesy claims the exclusive territory that can only be enjoyed by members and sycophants of photographic practice. "Outsiders" clearly have no empirical basis of understanding here. Furthermore, Lesy continues, such outsiders can only resort to imagining a conversation they cannot but hope to enter:

Many of the author's arguments may be described as semiotic. In such arguments, patterns of meaning are seen by students of culture to shine like dew-covered spider webs in a world changed, for the sake of analysis, from actual experience to fictive text. The unresolved internal argument in this discipline, inspired by Vico, elaborated by Freud, and practiced by students of such diverse disciplines as literary criticism, history and anthropology, is whether the webs of meaning have not actually been spun by the analysts themselves (ibid.).

In a most general respect, Lesy's dismissal of semiotic analysis is indicative of the contradictory critical activities played out by photographic and art journals

during the seventies. One paradoxical example is Afterimage, a journal founded in 1972 under the aegis of the Visual Studies Workshop of Rochester, New York, (home to the George Eastman House). In contrast to the more commercially-oriented photographic magazines, Afterimage offered an eclectic range of critical perspectives on photography. Periodically, it would publish lengthy feature articles addressing philosophical, ontological, sociological and language theory approaches to the medium, written by such authors as Rudolph Arheim, Howard Becker, and LeRoy Searle. In many instances, semiotic and structuralist theory was explicated and considered. Yet, in the majority of cases, and in the end, such methodologies were set aside. In April of 1975, Afterimage reprinted Arheim's essay, "On the Nature of Photographic Meaning", (first published in Critical Inquiry in 1974). Criticizing the observations made by Barthes in his 1961 essay, "Le message photographique", Arnheim writes,

By reducing the message to meager conceptual fare one accepts the impoverished practical responses of modern man in the street as the prototype of human vision. In opposition to this approach we must maintain that imagery can fulfill its unique function - whether photographic or pictorial, artistic or informational - only if it goes beyond a set of standardized symbols and exerts the full and ultimately inexhaustible individuality of its appearance (1975: 12).

Regardless of the interventions made by new models for photographic theorizing, this defense of unique individuality for the photograph and the photographer

continued within the photographic reviews of the journal. Furthermore, the fortification of this privileged version was intimately bound to the qualification made between the knowledgeable and emphatic critic, and the "impoverished practical responses of modern man in the street". While Afterimage presented many experimental photographic works which lay outside mainstream practices, theoretical approaches to the interpretation of these works, especially those which refuted authorship and autonomy, were generally ignored or abrogated. Similarly, photographic works which incorporated, however limited, structuralist concerns, were treated in a like manner by reviewers. In his 1979 retrospective article, "Summing Up the Seventies", the photographic critic Michel Lonier wrote:

[P]hotography has fled from the domain of the actual and the specific and has entered the realm of the speculative. Which is another way of saying that photography has lost its footing in the world. Instead these artists have pushed photography into the fields of philosophy and aesthetics; these works concern themselves with thought and with thinking about thought and with pictures and pictures that ask what it is to be a picture. Empirical photography, like empirical science has given way to mathematics. ...The problem is that photography is not a very adequate means for speculative thought (1979: 14).

Lonier continues throughout the remainder of the article to compliment the formalism of Lee Friedlander.

The reluctance with which photographic critics received structuralist and semiotic approaches to photography can be read as stemming from a number of interdependent arcs. This historical moment saw the unprecedented arrival of a new

generation of critics and academics for photography; among them Max Kozloff, Shelly Rice, A.D. Coleman, James Huginin, LeRoy Searle, Carl Chiarenza, and Dru Shipman. While these writers differed from their predecessors - straying from the historical/technological/genius formula of previous discourse to tentatively consider conceptual and socio-political issues - challenges to the photograph's value as art and the political agenda residing beneath its veneer of formalism remained at the level of a whisper. Foremost in this silence was the need to preserve the critic's newly-won professional status: a reputation built upon and reciprocally engaged with an isolationist and modernist construct of the photography, whose official interpretation demanded the knowing expertise of a select elite devotedly adhered to the faith. Quite obviously, a repudiation of the terms of the modernist construct for photography was also an injury to the critic. Equally, it must be kept in mind that the volatile market for photography at this time was one which simultaneously impoverished and advanced the exclusivity of the photograph and its select hermeneuts. The task of the critic, in keeping this exclusive medium safe from inadmissible 'outsiders', (both collectors and structuralist theorists), was crucial. One tactic of defense against intruders was to annul opposing perspectives as "impoverished", "academic" or "speculative". With such a rhetorical maneuver, the reputation of the medium, its constituting discourse, and the agents of this discourse,

are kept intact.

Yet, there may be some semblance of satirical truth behind this reactive slur. For much of the structuralist and semiotic modes of analysis offered for photography failed precisely because they were so far removed from any political or ideological concerns. The irony is that the defenders of a discrete, apolitical modernist practice unwittingly point to the apolitical indiscretions of its competitors. Rather than challenging and critiquing the political functions underlying the modernist canon for photography, structuralist and semiotic writings simply reinvested and reinforced the canon through yet another take on formalism. And while conceptual photographic practices forced a consideration of the work's own making, this consideration did not extend to the culture which generated the structure, and the structure of reception, for the art work. Such texts simply rearranged the furniture in a formalist suite, without exposing the role its allotment carried out or carried on.

One promise of structuralist semiotics was that it enabled close examination of the fabric of the 'doxa' or common-sense of meaning; making explicit what was normally disguised as implicit. At a similar level, such methodology allowed the designation of signifiers and signifieds (and their arbitrary equivalence), in order to convincingly display the hidden ideological processes at work in

signification. Such a mode of interpretation necessitated a historical context; indeed, its project was to reinstate history back into a de-historicized doxa. "Myth", Barthes writes in 'Mythology Today', "is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things; in it things lose the memory that that they once were made" (1972: 142). Just as the bourgeoisie is "the social class which does not want to be named ... meaning flows out of them until their very name becomes unnecessary" (ibid: 138), so too is the "depoliticizing" function of myth to "empty reality: it is literally, a ceaseless flowing out" (ibid: 143). Society thus dreams with its eyes shut to the efficacy of its fabrications.

Two strategies which allow for this blindness - which cloaks the contingent and historical relations of the world - are, (as they pertain to photography), Romantic Expressionism and Realism. Romantic Expressionism sees those who create photographic 'art' as original and superior beings. Realism understands photography to be the expression of something which is already there, (the real), before the photographer sets to work. Both exempt history for an explanation of an apriori - an already given essence or common-sense.

"The goal of all structuralist activity", writes Barthes, "is to reconstitute an object so as to manifest the rules of its functioning. [It] is a mode of thought ... which seeks less to assign completed meanings to the objects

it discovers than to know how meaning is possible, at what cost and by what means" (1972: 218). Yet much of the activity which structuralism undertook in discerning the functioning of photography was precisely directed at the assignation of completed meanings. More paradoxically, structuralist semiotics was used to recuperate an a priori, existential and realist ontology for the photograph; thus refashioning an object deprived of history.

One instance of the accessory of semiotics for the re-fabrication of a realist photographic ontology is found in Rosalind Krauss's series of articles, "Notes on the Index: Parts One and Two", published in October in the late seventies (1977). Basing her arguments upon the semiotic claim for the indexical nature of the photographic sign, Krauss speaks of the distinct, referential quality of the photograph. Unlike any other form of visual representation, with the exception of the cast, the death mask, or the physiotrace (a late 18th c. device for tracing profiles), the photograph is seen to be causally related to, or co-natural with, the object it depicts. Using this characteristic as her point of departure - coupled with Barthes' claim that the photograph "by virtue of its absolutely analogical nature, seems to constitute a message without a code" (1977: 43) - Krauss makes the assertion that contemporary art works utilizing the photograph somehow escape the grasp of society's constructions. In viewing the

photograph as uncoded - outside of the reaches of social convention - Krauss is then able to claim that such photo-works 'short-circuit the issues of style' (1986:208).

This oppositional capability of the photograph is seen to be directly dependent upon its indexical quality: "[The photograph's] veracity is beyond the reach of those internal adjustments which are the necessary property of language. The connective tissue binding the objects contained by the photograph is that of the world itself, rather than that of a cultural system" (ibid: 212). To assert this point even further, Krauss relies not only upon Barthes' writings in his "Rhetoric of the Image", but goes so far as to evoke Andre Bazin's ontological claim that "The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of time and space that govern it" (Bazin, 1967: 14, in Krauss, ibid: 203).

While she may wish to privilege a "jettisoning of convention, or more precisely the conversion of the pictorial and sculptural codes into that of the photographic message without a code" (ibid: 218), Krauss in fact recuperates the photographic convention of realism. Her dichotomized distinction between "the world itself" and a "cultural system" belies a realist notion of the transparency of photography, in which 'the real world' is imagined as a common-referent, ontologically prior to "a cultural system". What such a notion occludes is that the 'real', of which the photograph stands as indexical



'evidence', is not a 'natural' fact, but is rather the historical outcome of social and semiotic processes. As Barthes himself writes, "the absence of a code clearly reinforces the myth of photographic 'naturalness' ... the more technology develops the diffusion of information (and notably of images), the more it provides the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of a given meaning (1977: 44,46).

The 1975 publication by Artforum of Allan Sekula's watershed article, "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" was to mark a difference in the critical explanation of ideology and photography. In contrast to the artistic commendations of photographic criticism, Sekula launched an attack against two of the most venerated icons of artistic and documentary approaches to photography: respectively, Alfred Steiglitz and Lewis Hine. Asserting that the meaning of a photograph rests - not upon the private consciousness of an individual, nor the evidential proof of an image - but on particular historical and political contexts, Sekula undercut the epistemological and ontological supports of conventional photographic assessment. Arguing against "this particularly obstinate bit of bourgeois folklore - the claim for the intrinsic significance of the photograph" (1982: 86), Sekula claimed that photographs can only be understood as they are determined within specific "discourse situations". As "the

context of an utterance, the conditions that constrain and support its meaning, that determine its semantic target" (ibid: 85), discourse is understood as that which allows the photograph its significance at a given place in time. Sharing with Sontag the assertion that, "Any photograph has multiple meanings [and]... [p]hotographs, ... cannot themselves explain anything" (Sontag, 1977: 23), Sekula also leaned upon Barthes' characterization of the photograph as "polysemic": "the photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the possibility of meaning" (Sekula, 1982: 91). However, in contrast to the dramatized and ahistorical generalizations that persist throughout Sontag's book, (allowing her to collapse the violence of guns and phalluses with cameras), Sekula examines the historical specificity of a discourse situation which allows a photograph to "yield a clear semantic outcome":

Any given photograph is conceivably open to appropriation by a range of 'texts', each new discourse situation generating its own set of messages. We see this happening repeatedly, the anonymously rendered flash-lit murder on the front page of the Daily News is appropriated by the Museum of Modern Art as an exemplary moment in the career of the primitive freelance genius Weegee (ibid.: 91).

This recognition of a discourse situation clearly implicates the actions of not only photographers, but curators, collectors, institutions, markets, historians and critics in the construction of photographic meaning. The question was thus shifted from "what meaning?" to "why this meaning at this particular time and in whose interests?"; a

new mode of inquiry which addressed ideological rather than personal or formal motivation. In such a manner, Sekula laid bare not only the politics of an apolitical and ahistorical modernist construct for photography, but also laid blame upon those who would continue to persist in this voluntary blindness.

Furthermore, it is impossible even to conceive of an actual photograph in a 'free state', unattached to a system of validation and support, that is, to a discourse. Even the invention of such a state, of a neutral ground, constitutes the establishment of a discourse situation founded on a mythic idea of bourgeois intellectual privilege, involving a kind of 'tourist sensibility' directed at a photograph. Such an invention, as we have already seen, is the denial of invention, the denial of the critic's status as social actor (ibid.: 91-92).

In locating the photograph as a textual practice, rather than an autonomous object of contemplation and consumption, Sekula signaled the effectivity of semiotic methodology for political work on photography as a social practice. In turn, the "illusory status of criticism" (ibid.: 91) as an authoritative source of knowledge about the photograph was also to gradually come under scrutiny. But as succeeding events show, such periodic inquiry was not to inhibit criticism's disavowal of its own political machinations.

Less than a year after "The Invention of Photographic Meaning" appeared, Artforum published Sekula's "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War" (1975b). Focusing upon the aesthetic and economic recuperation of Edward Steichen's aerial reconnaissance photographs, Sekula

investigates the range of signification which now appends itself to these ostensibly functional photographs under an art-marketing, rather than military, discursive formation. In particular, he examines the "promotional discourse" which "facilitates and directs" the economic ownership of photographic images, and whose "most likely performers are dealers and critics" (1975: 29). Exposing the ideological forces at work under the putative neutral 'promotions' of abstraction and authorship, Sekula writes:

... although abstraction may try to excuse itself from any ideological stance in relation to its sources, it remains implicated in the very act of denial. One abstracts these photographs at the expense of all other meanings, including the use to which they were originally put.

On another level of meaning, estheticized documentary readings of war photographs tend to localize the human experience of war in the person of the photographer, who is usually male. ... By promoting the war photographer as a "concerned" and "innocent" witness, liberal ideology promotes an image of its own bogus humanism, while denying the fact that information, too, has been mobilized (1975: 31).

Sekula's essay, as others in this issue, is preceded by a quite remarkable editorial written by Max Kozloff, who was then executive editor for Artforum. This editorial is notable not only for its acknowledgment of the ideological productivity of artistic representation, (which heretofore had been largely absent within American art journals), but for the way it presents this relationship.

The articles in this issue imply that certain aspects of authoritarian art are broader in scope and more effective in impact than had been supposed ...

Two obvious questions overlap in these essays. Who were the contemporary controllers of the visual

statements and for what purposes? What has been the effect on art of specific ideological interests it has agreed, or has been made, to serve? ...

Even from these few articles, an important theme emerges that must challenge art criticism: the degree to which "high" cultural artifacts are designed or utilized to uplift, indoctrinate, or intimidate a mass audience often rivals the extent to which a mass medium is thoroughly colonized as a technique of control and domination (1975: 10).

In contrast to Sekula's comments which implicate all players and producers within the reproductive process of ideology, Kozloff advocates the notion that art and ideology are relatively autonomous. His somewhat hysterical and pseudo-oppositional approach, ("authoritarian art [is] broader in scope and more effective in impact than had been supposed"), only further deploys the created conflict between "ideology" and the innocence of art. In effect, Kozloff frames ideology as the product of a group of conspirators, to which he, as critic, clearly does not belong. It is something which happens at another time (the past) and to another people (the intimidated masses). By reducing ideology, art, and individuals into isolated social phenomenon, and by dichotomizing 'high' and 'mass' culture, Kozloff reinforces the prejudices of his practice. Disengaging himself from the process of ideology, he is free to continue in his distanced judgments.

There are clear example of this activity. Two months before this editorial was written, Artforum (Oct. 1975) published articles by Kozloff and Barbara Novak concerning the 19th c. Western survey photography shown in the

exhibition, "Era of Exploration: The Rise of Landscape Photography" (organized jointly by the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo and the Metropolitan Museum of Art). In situating Western survey photography as continuous with the spiritualist sensibilities of American 19th c. landscape painting, Novak's article is clearly delimited within the constructed comparisons and continuities of art-historical discourse. And while Kozloff momentarily ponders the instrumental use of these images at the end of his article, the majority of his writing is given over to a poetic commendation of their formalist and abstract qualities. Ironically, either essay, engaging in the historical reconstruction of topographical photography, could have stood in for Sekula's critical target.

By and large, photographic criticism in North America which inquired into the conjuncture of ideology and photographic representation was limited in its political activities. While the introduction of structuralist semiotics in North America allowed for the formulation of a new project for photographic criticism, this investment was circumscribed within the context of particular national, economic and political interests. Such factions imposed a certain selection or priority of meanings in the application of structuralist and semiotic methodology for photography.

In general, it was the hegemonic status of art which substantially defined the activities and articulation of a structuralist and semiotic methodology for photographic

criticism. While critical activity unfolded in California, New York City remained the central purveyor and consumer of photographic criticism, and the overwhelming concerns of New York City, as always, were art. The particular interests of the art-world then directed much of the inquiry into photographic signification; an inquiry which was fueled by, and belied, much of this purview's prejudices and legitimations. The consequences of this orientation are evidenced in critical writings, which - while tentatively acknowledging the existence of structural and ideological relations for photography - still couched these relations in dichotomized terms, (High versus Mass culture, Ideology versus 'the Real'), reinforcing the isolationist, dualistic and hierarchic tradition of conventional theorizing for art photography.

In this respect, writings which inquired into all forms of photographic practice as a process of signification were absent from the majority of art journals. Similarly, the importance of this consideration as it pertained to art photography as a specific activity of cultural production was missed by most photographic critics. (An exception is Alan Sekula's review essay on the paparazzi Ron Galella in Artforum (1975a). Where it did take place was outside of the concentrated control of status, publication, and market exhibited in New York: namely, in California. Moreover, this work, which expanded beyond the narrow

avenues of inquiry set by Art, was undertaken by individuals who were not only writers or photographic critics, but theoreticians and practitioners as well. Such work not only produced a critical perspective which broke with the reified categories and rigidly-held 'truths' of art photography, but also connected photography with social and political interests and placed the photographer in a position of responsibility regarding his or her images. In this respect, Alan Sekula stands as an obvious example. Martha Rosler is another.

Beginning in the mid-seventies, Martha Rosler has practiced not only as a photographic critic, (one early example being her critical review of Lee Friedlander in Artforum (1975), but as an artist, working from a variety of media which are often accompanied by verbal or written text. Both her critical and artistic work has consistently involved a theoretical inquiry into visual representation, most specifically how visual representations of women are produced, understood, and situated within particular social and political situations. Analyzing cultural production from a feminist perspective, Rosler's art practice in the seventies turned upon questions of communication, class, gender and race, as evidenced in her trilogy of photo-postcard novels, "Service: A Trilogy on Colonization" (1978).

Such concerns with the social relations of photography were more pronounced in criticism and practice in Britain,



which occupied a similar geographical positioning to those American writers who made their base in California. In contrast to structuralism's articulation to photographic criticism and practice in North America, which was largely circumscribed within and limited to the interests of art, photographic practice and criticism in Britain was never solely centered within the metropolitan art institutions of London; indeed, the majority of it came from outside of a privileged artistic nexus. As John Tagg has pointed out (1988: 8), there was, as yet, no strong canon for photography in Britain at this time. The corpus of photography was thus not centered upon Art, but dispersed among a number of trajectories; a dispersal which allowed an opening for alternative uses of structuralism within and upon the medium.

Having said this though, I do not wish to elide the quite specific differences between photographic practice and criticism in North America and Britain. The articulation of structuralist and semiotic method to photography in Britain was motivated by distinct concerns, institutional structures, and historical and national differences. In turning thus to photographic criticism in Britain, I want to mark out the particularities of this distinction. But I also want to refer to a point of commonality which coheres around certain liabilities such methodology carried.

## Footnotes

1. This sentiment has been frequently voiced ever since the close of the decade. See for instance Micheal Lonier's photographic review, "Summing Up The Seventies", Afterimage, (March 1979), p.14, wherein he speaks of "feeling that the decade is nearly over and nothing has happened". For further comments on this amnesia, see Victor Burgin, The End of Art Theory, (1986), pp.29,162, and Rosalind Krauss, "Notes on the Index: Seventies Art in America", Pt.1, October, no.3, Spring 1977.

2. See for example Robert C. Morgan, "Conceptual Art and Photographic Installations: The Recent Outlook", in Afterimage, Dec. 1981, vol.9, no.5, p.9.

"Concomitant with the expansion of the larger art market, photographs surged upwards in price, being introduced into the market on a massive scale. It is not now unusual to enter a downtown New York art gallery and see a 20 by 24 inch Polaroid by William Wegman, for example, placed besides ornamentalist paintings and sculpture. Somehow it all fits together. This market maneuvering has formented an air of competition that has been difficult to ignore. Consequently, for conceptual artists, a style of presentation and technical competence that is competitive with the 'quality' of 'straight' photography has become an expectation of the marketplace".

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### Chapter Three

#### Truth Behind False Images: Structuralism and Socialist Photographic Practice

In the previous chapter, I examined how the critical activity of structuralism was limited in its explication of the photograph within the context of North America. While this limitation may be explained as the result of a theoretical method parachuted into foreign and uncomprehending territory, the consequences of structuralism's importation had more to do with specific conditions of existence rather than an alien constitution.

As the last chapter shows, the particular liabilities of structuralism in North America stemmed from the situation to which it was articulated; namely, to the concerns of an art photography. Obligated to its own survival as a distinct object, art photography was by necessity bracketed off from the province of mass imagery; and to this end, the props of modernism supported its singular worth. In this respect, the extent to which political structuralisms would assess the photograph as a social and ideological practice of representation was severely restrained. It was left to synchronically view the photograph as an isolated object of analysis; an isolation which contradictorily precipitated the recuperation of strategies of formalism, the ideal 'subject', notions of 'the real', and realism as an approach to that real to which the photograph supposedly

corresponded. Like two sides of the same sheet of paper, the radical potential of structuralism was inverted to a conventional procedure which reinstated the photograph into the autonomous space of the art object. Thus, while 'the subject' disappeared under structuralism's systemic social process, it re-appeared on the flip-side as an artistic subject executing the ideational concepts of a photographic art. If, pace Saussure, meaning is only produced internally within the formal structure of the (photographic) frame, then photography could be written onto the same page as any other art object.

If the conditions of possibility which were available to structuralist analyses of photography in North America were circumscribed by the discourses of Art, its activity in Britain emerged within quite different circumstances. Key to this difference was both the presence of established theoretical constructs which took as their problematic the material relations of culture and representation, and the absence of a deeply-rooted institutional base for art photography. Based upon the re-publication of certain arguments made by Walter Benjamin in 1934 and 1936, photography was credited as radically curtailing the distance between art objects and audiences through its mechanical mode of reproduction, thus offering a materialist practice by which the mass public was granted accessibility to critique bourgeois society.<sup>(1)</sup> Placed against this

background, structuralism enabled photographic practice and criticism to become important forms of theoretical and political intervention; an engagement which moreover extended throughout the cultural arena to address questions of class, gender and race. But it too was plagued by the liabilities of certain of its assumptions and those using it. This chapter shall look to how the impediment and efficacy of structuralism in understanding photographic practice was also contingent upon certain contemporaneous problematics occupying Britain.

It must be re-stated that while structuralism played an important role in reconceptualizing photography and social relations, it too, as a methodological practice, was undergoing constant revision. Like other analytic methods, structuralism was and is both inconsistent and unstable; given over to different constituencies of thought and operation and different theoretical objects. In turning to Britain, this proviso must be voiced, for I am not interested in hermetically sealing structuralism's activity within a coherent national framework. In fact, the articulation of structuralism to photographic practice in Britain precisely signals its mutability, not only in terms of the conceptual choices and challenges it offered, but in terms of the theoretical, political and geographic locales it was offered to. Moreover, such mutability extended beyond the parameters of British concerns. Just as the theorization of photography is not contained within any



single methodological or disciplinary framework, neither are the objects and effects of those methods and theories which inform it. In this respect, the consequences emanating from the conjuncture of structuralism to photographic criticism in Britain were manifested beyond their original events, to take shape elsewhere.

My reasons for differentiating structuralism's articulation to photography in Britain lie not solely in the examples given above, but also to specify a certain tension within which it was situated and fashioned. I refer here to the structuralist/ culturalist debate within marxist cultural studies, whose transactions were importantly formative to this articulation. As Richard Johnson has written of these two divergent tendencies in the analysis of culture and ideology, "The two traditions do not merely co-exist, but interrupt each other" (1979: 55). While much attention has been paid to the conflictual aspects of this 'interruption', I should like to consider the theoretical and practical operations wrought from the co-existence of the two traditions. For it was within specific arguments which enunciated this debate, and published widely at the time in the journals Screen, Screen Education, and the Working papers on Cultural Studies, that structuralist propositions about photographic mediation were substantially positioned. Given the combination of concerns, concepts and epistemologies which these writings advanced, the ability of

structuralism to deliver specific analyses of photographic signification was tempered by its problematic insertion into the structuralist/culturalist debates.

In general, the dominant analytic focus which guided critical writings on photography at this historical moment took the form of a socialist perspective centering upon the ideological relations which constituted class.<sup>(2)</sup> Because of its supposed cohesion and possible structural power, the working class, (following Marxism), represented the agency of socialist struggle. However, in terms of a socialist photography, the designation of 'class' stood in for a series of hierarchical sites of struggle. As John Tagg writes in an early catalogue essay, "A Socialist Perspective on Photographic Practice":

[t]he diversity of formats, outlets and audiences [of a socialist photography], is matched by the diversity of formal strategies and by the range of issues opened up by the work: from cuts in social services and the lack of nursery provision, to industrial struggles, racialism, the double exploitation of women at work and in the home, patriarchy, oppression in the family, personal and political violence, international solidarity, sexist imagery in advertisements and children's books, unemployment, and the fetishism of commodity production (1979: 71).

Given the wide latitude which a socialist photography addressed, the methodological strategies appropriated for its tasks similarly encompassed a variety of approaches. However, as its practitioners and critical analysts were predominantly informed by the agenda of a Marxist cultural studies, the socialist perspective for photography rested upon, and was pulled between, certain assumptions of

culturalism and structuralism. Such critical practice then tended to reinstate both the positivities and liabilities of each, particularly as culturalism and structuralism advanced often opposing concepts of agency, a concept which lies at the heart of socialism's desire to change existing social relations.

While the concept of agency is not limited to that of the human subject, it was predominately at this level that the contestation between structuralism and culturalism, and its applicability to a socialist photographic practice, took precedence. On the one hand, while much of structuralist semiotics, (e.g.: early writings of Barthes) worked at explicating the ideological mystifications of an ideological society, its emphasis upon language as a formal, autonomous and self-regulating system exteriorized notions of the agency of the subject altogether. Indeed, if the subject was addressed at all, (and it was definitely left in abeyance), it was most often as simply the product of ideological discourse, 'spoken by' the structural arrangements of society.

In general, the sum of complaints leveled against structuralism centered upon its perceived lack of a materialist analysis. As the last chapter illustrated, Saussure's conceptualization of the signified as a mental, rather than material construct, led to charges of an idealism based upon a transcendental essence, and thus

not unfamiliar to that bourgeois ideology it set out to critique. Moreover, the entire process of meaning was seen firmly lodged within the 'structures' of language, necessitating a form of analysis that privileged langue (language) over parole (individual speech acts, actual language use). As Barthes has written of early structuralist semiotics, "Language worked on by power: that was the object of this first semiology" (1978: 12).

In contrast to structuralism, which analytically separated societies and their practices into discrete and autonomous instances, culturalism advocated "the study of culture as the study of relations between elements in a whole way of life" (Williams, 1961). In this respect, culturalism opposed itself (as did structuralism) to an elitist dichotomizing between 'high' and mass' cultures, and similarly to a classic Marxist distinction of an ideological superstructure determined by an economic base. Yet culturalism also came under attack for being too 'idealist'. Such charges were based upon its conceptualization of society as an "expressive totality"; in which certain practices are lined up in a descending series of homologies, coming to rest at a particular (class) experience. While such a concept is certainly a materialist one, culturalism's tenet that certain ideas can be read back to the material conditions in which people experience their social and class positions reveals a too easy equation. The experiential then becomes the guarantee or origin of the authenticity and

agency of a certain class practice or ideology. Contrary to the 'bloodless structures' of structuralism which have no necessary referential connection or unity other than their differences from one another, (thus denying any question of a unified, agential subject), culturalism attempted to retain a concept of the experiential in the context of the practices of society. As Stuart Hall describes this formulation:

The experiential pull in this paradigm, and the emphasis upon the creative and on historical agency, constitutes the two key elements in the humanism of the position outlined. Each, consequently accords 'experience' an authenticating position in any cultural analysis (1980: 63).

Counterpoised between the assumptions of culturalism and structuralism, socialist photography often worked within a contradictory framework which tended to annul some of the potential of each. Insofar as such photographic practices and criticism were interested in the ideological relations of photographic reproduction, they took up much of the shared agenda of each, which revolved precisely around the key term 'ideology'. Yet their interest and emphasis upon the material relations of class led them to reinstate a number of propositions which were in direct antagonism to structuralism's tenet of language constituted in difference. In effect, there was still the tendency to ascribe to a particular class a correspondence to a particular class ideology. What was wrought from this mixture was thus a critical essay on photography which was voiced in

predominantly dualistic and competing terms; in the end exchanging the positive complexity of certain analytic arguments for reductive ones.

An example of such an article may be Terry Dennet and Jo Spence's essay "Photography, Ideology and Education" (1976/77) which advocates the use of certain semiotic methods in teaching school children to discern the ideologically reproductive roles of stereotyping, bias and visual coding played out by the photographic medium. While the arbitrary nature of meaning construction under structuralism is emphasized with the intention of supplying (working class) school children access to alternative and positive images of themselves, the strategic contestation which this notion offers is lost under a reductive concept of ideological process.

Dennett and Spence begin this article with the argument that:

False consciousness arises from the compartmentalization, mystification and bias of 'knowledge' and as such encourages the inculcation of dominant values which places one area of experience in superiority to all others, thereby invalidating the experience of oppressed groups, bringing about a resultant lack of motivation on their part to redress the imbalance (ibid.: 43).

Ideology is proposed here as an illusory force which magically conceals the underlying reality of economic exploitation. Moreover, it is clear who is being duped by this magic act. While asserting that the dominant attitudes and values of society are the result of the "interlocking

structures of oppression" of patriarchy, capitalism and imperialism, Denet and Spence find that at root, "the fundamental oppression still remains a matter of one's class" (ibid.: 45).

Implicit in this argument are a number of assumptions which impact upon not only concepts of the subject and its relation to ideology, but also a particular understanding of the medium of photography. Foremost is a notion of ideology as arising from a stable and unalterable relation to economic forces, which thus corresponds to how it is represented. Appended to this is the concept that certain ideas are directed at or fixed to certain classes. Both notions, in the determinations they set forth, are antithetical to a view of language - or other signifying systems (such as photography) through which ideology is generated - as differently constructed and therefore not fixed to any one referent. While Dennett and Spence want to argue (following a structuralist semiotics) that photography is multi-referential, (and thus has the capacity not only to be deconstructed, but re-constructed to alternative or oppositional interests), at base their argument rests upon a stable and singular referent: the determinations of the economic and the authenticity of the working class. As Spence writes in a later and related article: "Students can also be encouraged to take their own photographs to record things of actual (or potential) importance to working class

people and which seldom appear in the photographs taken either by 'professionals' or 'amateurs' ((1978/79: 45). Moreover she states, "[p]roducing 'oppositional' images would therefore mean finding visual representations which can relate surface images to the structures within which their components are (invisibly) located" (ibid.). Such calls tend to reductively counter a real or truthful experience against a falsified representation, and hierarchically separate a 'false' surface from a more 'real' deep structure. Additionally, a realist ideology is recuperated for the photograph.

Informing much of the critical explication of socialist photographic works, including Spence's article, was Stuart Hall's essay, "The Social Eye of the Picture Post" (1972). As a conjunctural analysis of the various limits and potential of documentary photography in war-time Britain, Hall's article explains how the Picture Post was capable of expressing certain class and national identities, but lacked the means or the will to depict the structural relations of these constructed identifications.

Its [Picture Post] "social eye" was a clear lens. But its "political" eye was far less decisive. It pinpointed exploitation, misery, and social abuse, but always in a language which defined these as "problems" to be tackled with energy and goodwill. It never found a way ... of relating the surface images of those problems to their structural foundation (1972: 90).

The dominant concern of socialist photographic practice and criticism was to account for not only the product of the photograph's illusion - not only what was expressed or



communicated in a surface image - but how that illusion is itself produced. Because so much of photography (especially of the documentary genre) is treated as though it stands in for, or is identical to, the "real world", such a project is difficult. It entails going against the grain of the extremely tenacious and naturalized representational practice of realism. But such a task is crucial for a socialist photography, for to move beyond the product of the photographic image to excavate its means of production is, in the words of Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, "to find ideology out in the moment that it is produced" (1977: 46).

However, critics and practitioners had difficulty in extricating themselves from the reliance upon a realist characterization of the photograph, despite their assertions and intentions to the contrary. Even Hall's article slides into replicating the language of realism at certain points: his comment that the "social eye" of the Picture Post embodies a "clear lens" reinstates the rhetoric of transparency that realism is dependent upon. Moreover, the contrast of "surface imagery" with "structural foundations" implies that the former can somehow be broken and seen through to the a priori structures which they veil.

It is precisely this last instance that marks the difficulties facing a socialist photographic project, whose mandate was not just to semiologically decode the ideological products of capitalist society, but also to

reconstruct alternative and oppositional modes of visual expression. The conceptual structures used by semiotic analysis tended to place the photograph within a space in which it could be synchronically and singularly viewed - closed off and sealed in to its own internal workings. Through this scientific and formalist method, the photograph could be studied in its individuality. Coupled with this synchronic approach was a tendency to treat the whole of language (langue) as ahistorical; as existing for all time without historical change. As a result, the historical specificity which would signal the material relations of photographic texts was also proposed as impermeable; blocked off to other historical and material factors. The historicity of the photograph could only be read as unfolding internally.

In reading photographic texts in isolation, structuralism reinforced the use of dualistic oppositions. Thus, surface imagery may be countered against a structural foundation; an opposition which overlooks the processes of constitution that the foundation is itself beholden to. Moreover, such dualism tended to reinstate a passive, rather than agential, notion of the working class subject given over to dominant ideological forms. If the photographic text is isolated, and thus fixed in this isolation, then viewers are able only to accept or reject the text. Such a proposition severely undermines the possibility for reconstruction of the photographic text; for the photograph

remains firmly tied to the intentions of its operators and the passive receptivity of its receivers: "The type of stereotype used will, of course, depend upon who is sending and who is receiving the message" (Dennett and Spence, 1976/77: 45). This communicative model closes down the historical and material context of photographic production; the precise context needed for proactive work.

While culturalism offered a more thorough account of material and historical relations in its conceptualization of society as a totality of cultural practices, its placing of these practices within a series of homologues also pulled towards a reductivity, and the use of dualistic oppositions. In effect, in promoting the belief that certain structural functions of the photograph corresponded to certain class positions, culturalist tendencies also belied a belief in the realistic or transparent properties of the photograph. Moreover, such a correspondence was constructed upon the ground of an opposition: like structuralism, photographic texts, in their homologous construction, could be read as isolated, and thus in opposition to, an 'outside' dominant ideology. It is in this manner that the community-activist<sup>(3)</sup> artists Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn advocated in 1979;

[the development of] a practice outside the high culture context which opposes the structural-ideological framework of bourgeois hegemony, and to build its foundations within the context of working class liberation (1979:25).

Leeson and Dunn are careful to state that "the

ideological function of cultural production does not reside in the manifest ideology of content, the intentions of the producer, or even, necessarily, those ascribed by recipients, but is implicit in the structural-ideological signification of its context of operation" (ibid.: 17). Yet, there is still an exclusionary criteria set forth in the dichotomous opposition of 'outside' and 'within'. Such opposition contradictorily annuls what Benjamin saw as most powerful and potentially threatening about photography: namely, its capacity to blur the distinctions between 'inside and outside' or 'us versus them'.

Another consequence of this bifurcation is evidenced in Spence's article, "What Do People Do All Day?: Class and Gender in Images of Women" (1978/79), wherein she attempts to rectify what she sees as a drawback in analyses of gender and photography "which concentrate solely on the binary opposition male/female at the expense of other possible oppositions, notably of labor/capital" (ibid.: 29). Spence's interest in class stems from the notion that "class relations are structural and, therefore ... absent", whereas "sexuality [is] constructed through a system of representation" (ibid.: 37-38). Obviously, the substitution or addition of one binary opposition for an other does not pose a solution to the limitations of analysis. Moreover, this binarism rests upon an implicit presupposition of an a priori (structural) 'reality' to which the photographic corresponds; a realism based upon the reciprocal assertions

of binary oppositions.

In the first issue of Camerawork, (formed jointly by the Photography Workshop and the Half Moon Photography Workshop Collectives), Jo Spence outlined the motives of the journal in terms of its distinction from other mainstream photography magazines and the photographic practice which Camerawork advocated. In regards to the latter, Spence referred to the inception of two alternative practices in the seventies: the establishment of photo-news agencies such as Report and I.F.L. (International Freelance Library), and that of community activist photography.

The most recent break with traditional fields of photography as a TOOL by community activists ... The main objective here is to enable people to achieve some degree of autonomy in their own lives and to be able to express themselves more clearly, thus gaining solidarity with each other (1976: 1).

Expanding beyond the space of the gallery, these works were produced for street exhibition in various communities. The photographic practice which informed them was taken from the leftist visual work of the 30's: John Heartfield's  
(4)  
montages, Russian Constructivism, and worker documentary photography such as Mass Observation. While some collectives began by using a social documentary approach, this practice was soon abandoned due to its reliance upon the traditions of realism. As the feminist Hackney Flashers Collective critiqued one of its earlier projects: "The photographs assumed a 'window on the world' and failed to question the notion of reality rooted in appearances"

(1979: 80). Photo-montage, which simultaneously underlined and undermined the realist characteristics of the photograph, - cutting out and displacing fragments of realist imagery to unveil the fictionality of realist representation - became the photographic practice of choice. Used by such collectives as Hackney Flashers, the various community and educational activist projects of the Photography Workshop, The Cockpit Arts Project, Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn's community interventions, and individual work by Victor Burgin, photo-montage was seen as exhibiting the contradictions which lay hidden in the conjuncture of ideology and representation.

We began to juxtapose our naturalistic photographs with media images to point to the contradictions between women's experience and how it is represented in the media. We wanted to raise the question of class, so much obscured in the representation of women's experience as universal (ibid.)

Again, the limitations of this work stemmed from its litigation of oppositions. Relying upon Heartfield's strategy of interrupting certain images with other contradictory ones, or that of opposing text to imagery, such work, while bringing contradiction to the fore, restricted the processes which produce meaning to a simple choice of either/or. The choice was limited between 'positive or negative', 'capitalist or worker', 'women or patriarchy' or 'the real and the fictional'. The traffic between these polarities was constrained to traveling back and forth between each, resting inevitably upon the 'proper'

decision.

An example of the difficulties of this work can be evinced in Victor Burgin's early photo-text series "U.K. '76". Laying written text over photographic imagery, Burgin contrasts rather utopian and glamorized language with black and white images of workers, private property and council estates. In one, 'St. Laurent demands a whole new lifestyle', the photograph of an immigrant woman working in a sweat-shop is overlaid by a romantic descriptive text taken from a fashion magazine: "Hips matter alot ... By night black velvet camisole bodices extend down over the hipline then the bright taffeta skirt swings free". Contrasted with the image of this woman, the question of what 'matters' and what 'springs free' is ironically placed and underscored. Yet left in abeyance in this juxtaposition of 'the real' material and exploitive conditions of labor with its mystified and captivating products is the recognition that both text and image are the result of particular material and rhetorical processes. The black and white 'realist' photograph is as equally given over to certain codes and traditions as the advertising text, and therefore cannot be privileged as any more 'truthful', or 'real' than its constituted 'opposite'.

While none of the artists referred to above would refute the importance of recognizing the specificity of historical and material relations in which the photograph is

produced, certain assumptions informing their theoretical and methodological direction inhibited this task. In effect, aspects of structuralism and culturalism acted to contain the theorization of the photograph within the unified framework of a conceptual opposition, whose antagonistic poles are already known in advance to the signification of the photograph itself.

As shown, this use of opposition not only acted to isolate the photograph from its heterogeneous material field of relations, but also allowed for the recuperation of a reflectionist discourse of realism. For the conceptualization of oppositions also entails, as its palimpsest, a notion of co-terminous relations. Both correspondence and opposition are essential, and essentialized, to the mutual reciprocity and exclusivity of each other. Whether conceived in antagonistic exclusion, or strung along a chain of signification, the meaning of a photograph still lies anchored to a sequential and singular space. In this way, the photograph is given over to the attribution of final and closed meanings: the authenticity of class experience, or the stable foundation of ideological structure. Both autonomous semiotic systems or established organicist conceptions lead back to a realist ontology of origins. The very ideal of 'unmasking' an ideology reveals the presupposition of a pre-given reality, or an oppositional class ideology, which stands as the 'truth' against which the falsity of ideology can be discerned. At



their extreme, such notions paradoxically refute the basic claims of structuralism: for holding forth the possibility that something exists before representation belies the very notion of the irreducibility and conditionality of signification which structuralism offers.

What these difficulties reveal are the liabilities posed by a conceptualization of photographic signification and ideology which fails to take into account, or simply has no room for, a consideration of the contributions of subjects. For it is only with a deliberation of human subjects that photographic representation can begin to be fully realized as not only product, but process. Despite the intentions of those acting in the interests of a socialist photography, they were unable to fulfill the possibility of collective and individual self-determination because they were left without the means to think through how people are not only subjectively constructed by photographic representation, but also enable its social construction. With such a 'subject' missing, this ideological theorization of the photograph was left to conceptualize subjects as only the effects of the medium, rather than also effecting the very conditions of its productivity. And such determinate effects are also seen to have their determining causes. In placing subjects 'outside' of the productive processes of photography, and viewing them as only beholden to the end-results of photographic signification, other factors - such as a

structural 'reality' - could also be posed in an exteriority and read off as generating and determining such results. It was thus in a similar manner that the critic, of necessity, was established 'outside' of the photograph's field of operations.

This relation of exteriority in which the photographic critic acted was not only a consequence, but also a condition of structuralist theorizations of the photograph. And as such it had quite specific effects in terms of the activity which photographic criticism was to execute. Taking their lead from the structuralist tenet that "meaning is created in difference", critics were to move from the self-sufficiency of a 'purely visual' photographic object to examine those larger structures created to organize the meaning of the photograph. This structural organization was itself based upon difference; structured arbitrarily in its difference from other systems of meaning production. Yet, this difference was conceived as oppositional; a conception which, in the end, collapses difference back onto fixed identities: of race, of class, of gender and of sexuality. Members of each above constituency were viewed as fixed in these differences; a perspective evidenced for example in Spence's article on representations of class and gender. Left untheorized, human beings were defined only in the sameness of their differences among each other, rather than by the contradiction of these differences which exist within each person. One could be both working class and a woman,

but one could not simultaneously subscribe to the contradictory identities of capitalism and a leftist working class, or feminism and an androcentric sexism. The crucial point here is that the photograph was conceptualized in a similar way: within a system of closure. The specific meaning that a photograph carried was thought of only in its opposition to other meanings/photographs. What was missing was the notion of the photograph as a crowded image within which a myriad of meanings and identifications - of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. - can exist or be absent, can conflict or collide, at any given moment for any given person.

Raymond Williams has traced out the impetus that led early formalist semiotics, reacting against concepts of language and expression as 'natural', to reduce "the whole process to what it saw as its basic constituents; to 'signs' and then to a 'system of signs' (1977: 167). While Williams finds that this semiotic procedure 'notably strengthens the sense of a production of meanings', he also points to how the assumptions proposed by this form of semiotics carries its own 'mythology', albeit a newer one (ibid.).

For the 'sign' is 'arbitrary' only from a position of conscious or unconscious alienation. Its apparent arbitrariness is a form of social distance, itself a form of relationship. ... The formal quality of words as 'signs', which was correctly perceived, was rendered as arbitrary by a privileged withdrawal from the lived and living relationships which, within any native language (the language of real societies, to which all men belong), make all formal meanings significant and substantial, in a world of reciprocal reference, which

moves, as it must, beyond the signs. To reduce words to 'arbitrary' signs, and to reduce language to a 'system' of signs, is then either a realized alienation (the position of the alien observer to another people's language...) or an unrealized alienation, in which a specific group, for understandable reasons, overlooks its privileged relationship to the real and active language and society all around it and in fact within it, and projects onto the activities of others its own forms of alienation. ... [W]hat really follows is the universality of alienation, the position of a closely associated bourgeois idealist formation... (ibid.: 168).

Appropriating Williams' momentarily, one may see how the 'alienation' which structuralism necessitated, its "privileged withdrawal from ... relationships which ... make all meanings significant and substantial", also allowed photographic critics to continue in the traditional activity of interpretation: in which a singular text is examined, read for its 'meaning', (or formal values), and set against and measured to certain rules of conformity (or canon). It was in effect structuralism's collusion of difference with a fixed identity - based upon an epistemology of separation and opposition - which left secure the photographic critic's status as a distant adjudicator and authoritative 'expert' of photographic signification. The relation of exteriority which structuralism lent photographic criticism meant that critics could continue to ignore the lines drawn around their own institutional and professional structures, and which they themselves draw around what they do.

An example of the authoritative distance maintained by photographic criticism during this historical moment may be evinced in the records of the first and second conferences

on photographic criticism in North America. In the spring of 1976, A.D. Coleman organized the first conference in New York City. Attended by critics Alex Sweetman, Shelly Rice, Mark Powers and Coleman, (Alan Sekula was invited but could not attend), the conference was proposed as a means to institutionally and professionally consolidate the protean practice: to "share certain understandings and explore commonly-faced issues" (Coleman, 1976: 9). The methodological basis from which photographic criticism was to justify its stature was located within the tradition of hermeneutics, or rather, "the inferential borderline between exegetics and hermeneutics - that point of which analysis, analogy, intuition and speculation make it sometimes possible to comprehend the 'why' of a work and communicate that in words" (ibid.) This then is the critic as hermeneut: giving definitive and clarified meanings to the opacity of the photograph; expertly decoding the jumbled meanings of signification. The photographic critic translates and interprets for others who cannot (possibly) be expected to see. Their blindness, and the critic's insight, is dependent upon a conceptual schism that locates the critic in a different signifying order from that of others. In marking this distance, the critic establishes his or her innocence from the 'ideological domination' which clouds the vision of others, and thus validates his or her credentials as an objective and knowledgeable interpreter.

The second conference, also organized by Coleman and held at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York, April 22-24, 1977, was a substantially larger institutional affair. Including writers from both the United States and Canada, it offered 15 papers on the broad subject of photography and criticism, some of which were presented within seminars closed to the public. Of note were papers which partially appropriated structuralist semiotics to consider the multi-referentiality of conceptual-based photography (Hugunin, 1977: 43). One paper, entitled "Photographic Criticism as Art Object", attempted to explicate how criticism itself was as structured as its chosen object. Its author, Byron Henderson, states:

My approach is that most of what we write and talk about is a reification of a value structure or fix on the world, and some vision of what we do and how we approach things. ... After we understand what structure it is that impels us to see things in a certain way, we can go beyond that (1977: 30).

Henderson's paper was met with much confusion and some negation at this conference. While the question of critical authority was periodically addressed, it was only posed and accepted upon primarily uncritical grounds. In one such discussion, Martha Chahroudi, whose paper was analytically aimed at the recent exhumation of 'naive' historical photographers for the purposes of 'art', states with some exasperation:

I feel its silly to be talking about whether we are authorities, when the majority of at least this first group of papers are all pleas for establishing some kind of standardization. How are we talking about

photographs? What kind of language do we have to talk about photographs? ... I really think these are more important issues than whether we are authorities or not (1977: 28).

Most of her colleagues concurred. A.D. Coleman's reply was cloaked in a self-effacing pluralism: "I think the crux of the problem here is that on the one hand authority is given to virtually everyone who writes, and on the other hand we are aware of how literally unauthoritative our statements are ..." (ibid.). Stephen Perloff agreed, and went on to again to call for a professionalized criteria and function for the critic:

I think that the problem is that we are all in a position of authority, but we are not all authoritative. We don't have a body of knowledge that can support our views. I don't think the role of the critic is to establish an absolute truth about a body of work, but to mediate between that work and the public. Its very much an educational function (ibid.).

The distance created between the pedagogical hermenuet and his 'pupil' is one simultaneously denied and reaffirmed. This is of course in line with that criticism developed and formalized by a modern art photography, which interprets and asserts the formal structures of the art object, but remains elusive to both the object's and its own discursive structuring. Returning to Williams' text, we may see that the privileges of such exteriority exist as long as criticism remains unconscious to its own activities, which are equally permeated by history and convention.

While Williams may be positioned as unduly claiming the authenticity of experience in his citation of "lived and

living relationships", he points how it is only with a consideration of the experience 'within language' that the damages done by structuralism's privileged withdrawal can be rectified. What is most interesting about this historical moment is the emergence of the hybrid theoretical critic/photographer; a new generation whose experience both as practicing photographers and as writers was to disturb the sancticity of the 'pure' critic. Such disturbances were not to go unnoticed or without a defense. As part of a series of interviews with critics taped by Studio International at the end of 1974, Max Kozloff responded to a question pertaining to artists who also write criticism;

Where [criticism by artists] tends to differ, obviously, is that it is infinitely more intensified as a vehicle of self-expression, and of style, and of dominance, above all. It tends to be extremely manipulative criticism, ... That is, the ultra-competitiveness of the fixed position of the artist, finding expression in words now as an extension of the physical or visual artifact. ... On the other hand, its strengths become its weaknesses: its blinkered rigidities, its extraordinary intolerance, its imperious attitudes, its historical determinism, its refusal to see the field, its spot-lighting and canonization of two or three individuals ... (1975: 83).

What is intriguing about Kozloff's statements is that it is uncertain as to whether he is speaking of artists/critics or the institution of criticism itself. Despite this ironic confusion, he clearly bases the defense of his practice upon its claims of neutrality and objectivity. In contrast to the writings of artists, he sees his criticism as not given over to the vanities and



conceits of a profession based upon the 'fixed position' of subjective expression and experience.

Certainly the concept of experience cuts both ways: being at once the privileged ground by which to authenticate a lived activity, and a subjective, unauthorized and thus unreliable testimony. But experience entails being both within the activity of language and looking back upon that activity - it does not inhibit critical reflexion, but in fact takes part of its impetus from it. In this manner, the experiences of socialist photographers who also theorized photographic production - Burgin, Spence, Sekula, Dennett, Leeson and Dunn - led them to use this combinant form to move on and revise from their previous practical and theoretical base. In a later interview, Victor Burgin would state:

There is absolutely no hope of a privileged position exterior to ideology from which we can view or correct it, and come up with our own 'true' version. It may sound as if I'm making a fine theoretical point, but it does have profound consequences for one's practice - for example its led me away from a simply propagandistic sort of work (1982: 2).

It was in part this self-conscious development of expertise which led photographers and photographic critics to consider more thoroughly and theoretically the involvement of subjects and subjectivities in the production of photographic meaning. Such considerations entailed a different conceptualization of ideology, or rather, spurred a number of debates upon the relations between ideology, representation and the subject. This primacy of the subject

in theorizing ideology and representation acted to break down the distance of previous accounts - a distance created through the conceptual opposition of closed structures and recreated through a critical exteriority. Importantly, it was the contributions of feminist theorists which would annul some of the distance overwhelming centered on difference. In the next two chapters I shall examine the intersection of feminist, psychoanalytic, and post-structuralist theories which were to radically displace and renew concepts of subjects, differences, ideology, and photographic representation. Through these conceptualizations, the project of photographic criticism would again be refocused.

## Footnotes

1. "What we must demand of the photographer is the ability to put such a caption beneath his picture as will rescue it from the ravishes of modishness and confer upon it a revolutionary use value. And we shall lend greater emphasis to this demand if we, as writers, start taking photographs ourselves. Here again, therefore, technical progress is, for the author as producer, the basis of his political progress. In other words, intellectual production cannot become politically useful until the separate spheres of competence, to which, according to the bourgeois view, the process of intellectual production owes its order, have been surmounted; more precisely, the barriers of competence must be broken down by each of the productive forces they were created to separate, acting in concert". Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", (1934).

This quote, as others of Benjamin's cited here, is interesting in the ways it signals not only the contemporary hopes pinned upon the 'revolutionary use value' of the photograph, but also the existence of 'authors as producers', - photographers who are also writers and who attempt, with some success, to surmount 'barriers of competence'.

2. Key examples of photographic theory and criticism which based itself upon the methodology of a structuralist semiotics for an ideological critique are: Victor Burgin, "Photographic Practice and Art Theory", Studio International. vol. 190, no. 976, 1975; Terry Dennett and Jo Spence, "Remodelling Photo-History", Screen. vol. 23, no. 1, 1982; Judith Williamson, "How Does Girl No. 20 Understand Ideology", Screen Education. no. 40, Winter 1981/82; and especially the anthology Photography/Politics: One. Photography Workshop, London: 1979.

3. Lorraine Leeson and Peter Dunn have collaborated on various community arts projects since 1975. Widely utilizing photographic montage work, their projects have taken place at various sites of conflict between community and state/capital throughout England: Ruislip, Peterlee, and Bethnal Green. Perhaps their best known endeavor has been the Docklands Community Poster Project, which has been ongoing for nine years. While the central and most visible element of the DCPD has been its large-scale photomurals, which began in 1981 and chronologically records "The Changing Picture of Docklands: Big Money is Moving In", the project also coordinates street theatre projects, organizes demonstrations, and has established an archive of the social

history of the community. Each activity has been directed at reclaiming the neighborhood from current massive development organized by combined multi-national capital and government support.

4. Heartfield's anti-fascist photo-collages are only the most visible and commonly attributed historical precedent here. Hannah Hoch, Max Ernst, Raoul Hausmann, George Grosz, El Lissitzky, Alexander Rodchenko, and Lazlo Moholy-Nagy also worked within the politically disruptive practice of photo-montage and collage in the Soviet Union and Europe of the 20's and 30's. Of the photo-montage work of the Dadaists, Hausmann has written:

They were the first to use photography as material to create, with the aid of structures that were different, often anomalous and with antagonistic significance, a new entity which tore from the chaos of war and revolution and entirely new image: and they were aware that their method possessed a propoganda power which their contemporaries had not the courage to exploit (in Ades, 1976: 10-11).

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## Chapter Four

### Experiencing Difficulties: Post-structuralism, Photographic Criticism and Uncertain Subjects

When language is revealed as a system of differences with no positive terms, then the whole notion of 'inherent meaning' can be discarded. All those representations thought to be true, (because affirmed in photographic imagery or common-sense), are shown to be the result of arbitrarily structured oppositions. The value of structuralist semiotics lay in the way it not only cut short the mirage of the transparent reflection of language, but simultaneously brought down the unified Cartesian subject who was the locus or source of meaning. It was the task of a socialist photography to fracture the coherency of these structures, particularly as they were built within the photograph, a medium 'known' for its innate plausibility. But the method used for such ends was that of the iconoclast arguing against the iconophile. The terms of argumentation were the same. Using a confrontational, negative aesthetics to oppose convention entailed substituting one binary opposition for another. Burdened under the weight of a formal system, the practice was politically deadlocked: 'truth' or 'common-sense' was reproduced in the name of its deconstruction. Left to recuperate those very structures which it set out to critique, a socialist semiotic

photographic practice could not progress, but only reiterate its point of departure again and again. The only factor which could interrupt this impasse and confuse its systemic logic - the subject - was exempted from the very conditions of signification and ideology.

While much of the effectivity of socialist photographic practices stemmed from the manner in which they placed themselves outside of the art institution and petitioned different audiences, aspects of this interiority also posed certain liabilities. For while this critical practice aimed at intertwining a representation of politics with a politics of representation, the full bearing of the latter concept was never realized. What was missed in this theoretically informed activity was that critical practice, as Benjamin perceived, does not just entail an attitude "to the relations of production of its time", but also inhabits a specific "position in them" (1978: 222). This is not a determinate or fixed position of address, but rather one which mutates and derives its functions from a historically changing present. As it is itself contextually determined, the meanings and politics articulated by a photograph cannot be divorced from the circularity of the present which enfolds them. There is then no 'outside' from which to take aim upon 'dominant' discourses, there are only certain strategic tactics implicated and activated from within.

These lines of territoriality begin to disperse when the boundaries marking off theory from criticism and from a



critical photographic practice also begin to dissolve. When the artist as critic and critic as artist can no longer be just a dispassionate and informed observer or an inventive and creative artist, then categorical differences (between creative and critical texts); between theory and practice) become eroded. With feminism's important statement that the personal is political, the parameters and the instability of both social and analytic categories are brought into view. New subjectivities are theorized that can no longer be contained within older allocations, and which signal the impossibility of marking out a stable and inert consensus. In the abyss left between the always visible Cartesian subject and the wholly subject and invisible subject - between the recto and verso of binary oppositions - the depth model falls away from sight.

In his catalytic essay "The Death of the Author", Barthes writes of how, when authorship is elided, the text is revealed as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1977a: 146). When asked then, "Who is speaking thus?", the reply must always be "it is language which speaks" (ibid.: 143). There is nothing which precedes or exceeds the text, no author from which this idea was born, there is only a "field without origin": language. As Barthes goes on to state, this denial of precedent poses severe problems for criticism, whose explanations seal themselves with the

imporousness of authorship and reality. Faced with the impossibility of fixing interpretation upon a stable entity which governs the text's or image's production, criticism is itself drawn into crisis:

Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, ... when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' - victory to the critic. Hence there is no surprise that, historically, the reign of the Author has also been that of the Critic, nor again in the fact that criticism (be it new) is today undermined along with the Author. In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered ... (ibid.: 147).

However, as we know, criticism is still left intact and seemingly unscathed by the eviction of the author. For while texts and images are entangled with a multiplicity of significant threads, there are different patterns in which the possibility of meaning is fabricated. As Elizabeth Cowie explains, "the endless possible signification of the image is always, and only a theoretical possibility. In practice, the meaning is always held, constrained in its production of meaning or else becomes meaningless, unreadable" (1977: 16). For Barthes then, the restrictive conditions of the text move from a certain place of origin to a more uncertain position of destination. In effect, the author is excised to make room for the reader; the reader being "simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written text is constituted" (Barthes, 1977: 148).

It was to the reading or spectating subject that photographic criticism was thus to turn in its explication of photographic mediation. As Barthes reminds us, this move to the subject did not entail a return to a personalized individual, for "the reader is without history, biography, psychology" (ibid.: 148). But neither did it commend an ahistorical abstracted subject, for in occupying that space "on which all quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost" (ibid.), the reader is of necessity one who functions historically, and whose experiences of past readings forever continue in their present effects.

From within this conjuncture of associated interests, the critical function of a photographic practice came to be recognized as both internally and externally inflected. Appropriating key concepts from what can be termed post-Saussurian, post-Marxist, but more commonly, post-structuralist thought, photographic critics were allowed the theoretical and methodological means to begin addressing that "tissue of quotations" (Barthes, 1977: 146), which falls between an experience lived and an image observed. For in so far as it was the reading/spectating subject which was now conceived as the theoretical nexus of signification, the experience of that subject became a crucial factor in accounting for the production of meaning. Obversely, ideology had now unquestionably been understood as being the

very condition of a subject's experience of the world. The viewing subject could not be extricated from the conditions of the historical present in which a photograph was ideologically produced. Moreover, subjects were seen as not only beholden to a photograph's ideological effects, but also determining its effectivity precisely because they are constituted as subjects by ideology.

Drawingly from Louis Althusser's concept of ideology and Jacques Lacan's theory of subjectivity and the positioning of subjects within language, subjects were argued to be structurally integral, rather than supplemental, to the production of photographic meaning. As Althusser would explain, "... [T]he category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology ... in so far as all ideology has the function (which defines it), of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (1971: 160). In terms of contemporaneous photographic theory, Victor Burgin would later write in an essay published in Screen, (the journal which extensively provided much of the basis for this theoretical inquiry),<sup>(1)</sup> "... the seeing subject, (the individual who looks); to introduce this subject is, in the same movement, to introduce the social world which constructs, situates and supports it" (1980: 76).

The introduction of this "subject who looks" allowed the means by which photographic critics could begin thinking through the complex imbrications of photography and textualized subjects. And yet, as it is made up of multiple

registers and articulated to different ends - as it cannot be strictly contained as a paradigm - the positivity which post-structuralism offers leads to a number of conceptual choices. To the extent that post-structuralism emphasizes social explanations of individual experience and practice, the photographic criticism which it has informed is illuminating and persuasive. However, much of this work ends up erasing any maneuverability on the part of the subject. In many respects, post-structuralism has contradictorily been put into service in reducing the active process of relations between the practices of subjectivity and photographic representation to an apriori product of social forces. Limiting politically, because they refute the subject's ability to reflect upon photographic discourse and challenge its determinations, such analyses also appear popular to photographic critics - precisely because they locate and fix a determinate origin for the subject (again). In this chapter, and the two succeeding it, I want to consider some of the consequences of post-structuralism which both limit and enable the understanding of photography, subjectivity and ideology.

In attempting to theoretically explicate the construction of subjectivity in a photographic encounter, photographic criticism, as mentioned, has relied heavily upon the theoretical lines laid down by Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. As my intentions are

centered around the specificity of criticism, rather than the theoretical debates which inform it, I shall only briefly sketch out the premises of this analysis.

On the basis of Saussure's work, it became possible to argue that, in so far as experience is articulated through language, it necessarily participates in ideology. The means through which people represent themselves and their lives - their relationship to the conditions of existence which surround them - came to be seen as only feasible within language and other practices of representation. As representation is created within systems of difference, and thus irreducible, it is theoretically viewed as having the capacity to stretch endlessly within a potentially limitless range. There is no necessary closure of meaning, for statements and texts are produced not only in difference, but in their contingent differences and agreements with other texts. Meaning is thus produced intertextually. But in the social world, meaning must come to rest somewhere. Certain conditions and contexts - certain discourses - support and constrain meaning at any given time. The photographic production of meaning, for example, is given a particular fixity, dependent upon the limits, number and specificity of discourses which circulate through and around the image and those who view it. Yet, in contrast to previous aesthetic and theoretical accounts, this fixity was not seen as lying within the materiality of the photographic apparatus. Rather, it is seen to rest more within 'the

text'. And as Stuart Hall explains this particular notion of 'text':

Texts do not express a meaning (which resides elsewhere) or 'reflect reality': they produce a representation of 'the real' which the viewer is positioned to take as a mirror reflection of the real world: this is the 'productivity of the text' ... However, this 'productivity' ... is founded on the process of the formation of the subject (1980: 159).

In using language and other signifying practices to articulate experience, human beings are seen to be irrevocably implicated within an arena of ideological and social difference and conflict. This conception necessarily pulls away from the excluded subject of structuralism, to a view of the subject as actively involved in reproducing social relations of meaning and difference. If human beings are to be understood as laboring to produce meaning, this labor is also seen to entail the self-production of subjects. This paradoxically then, is a production in which systems of discourse and meaning (re)inscribe the subject in power relations.

Based upon his re-reading of Freud, Lacan introduced two important concepts pertaining to the reconception of the (re)production of subjects. His analyses of subjectivities, which stress the mobility and plurality of subject/object relations and the different modes of being entailed by them, departs completely from the ghost of an essentialized and unified individual. In claiming that the unconscious is structured like language, Lacan refuted any concept of the

unconscious as being innate, to emphasize how our subjectivities are structured by systems of difference (particularly sexual difference). The entry of the subject into language is for Lacan, the entry of the subject into culture and thus systems of symbolic power: into different systems of signification which exact different subject-positions and subjectivities. Consciousness of the self, which is impelled by this entrance into culture and language, is itself only possible through that process of differentiation which is the function of language. The subject of "I" is only possible with the designation "you".<sup>(2)</sup>

Althusser took up Lacan's notions of subject-positions and subjectivities in order to adapt them to a critique of orthodox Marxist conceptions of ideology. Breaking with previous Marxist concepts of ideology, he offered a model of the work of ideology in which the subject is given over to the many different determinations of many different discourses at any one place in time. This too breaks with a notion of a unified subject, as well as a (somewhat) unified production of ideology, which is determined, as a last instance, by the economic conditions of a capitalist society. Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' suggests how we are 'hailed'; brought into different subject-positions at different times and places by different discourses.<sup>(3)</sup> Ideology for Althusser is a way of talking about how we become subjects: subjected to different arrangements of power. It can no longer be conceived of in



terms of 'false consciousness', for if we are conscious beings then we are already in ideology. There is no 'true', humanist subject veiled by ideology, just as there is no 'real' which is shrouded. The 'real' and ideology are intertwined in the same way that subjects and ideology are meshed: both are the constructs of ideology.

While the contributions of Lacan and Althusser are extremely important for the reconceptualization of a subject's relations to ideology, there are problems, both with their own propositions and more importantly, the manner in which they were subsequently adapted by poststructuralist and 'Screen theory'.<sup>(4)</sup> (I will be dealing with these liabilities only briefly here, for they will be expanded upon in ensuing chapters). The criticism leveled against Lacan's theory of the psycho/sexual construction of the subject (like language) is that these differences which constitute subjects are said to originate in 'unconscious processes'; thereby positing an a priori set of differences which can always, ultimately, be referred back to. As Hall complains of 'Screen theory', which widely adopted Lacan's theorizations; "It is the psychoanalytic process by which 'the subject' is constituted in the 'symbolic' which explains how language/representation function (in any/every other instance)" (1980: 160).

Similar charges can be laid against Althusser, but of a much different nature. If both the 'real' and 'the subject'

are constructs of ideology, then ideology is in danger of losing its specificity. It comes to be conceptualized as a closed and functional system. This poses not only analytic problems, but political ones, for if the function of ideology is to (re)produce subjects for capitalist and patriarchal society, then human beings only function for such ends. What space then is allowed for subjects to struggle against ideologies of capitalism and patriarchy? This too may slide into a determinism, wherein the economic and the patriarchal become the 'last instance'.

The attraction of Lacan and Althusser's theorizations for photographic critics lay in the way in which, against unitary conceptions of society and subjectivity, they offered a much more complex means to begin thinking the contingent relations between subjects, subjectivities and society. Through the concepts of overdetermination and contradiction, Althusser and Lacan offered the means by which to break, on theoretical terms, with concepts of both wholly dominated or freely voluntaristic subjects. The subject - who is structured, (like language), in difference - inhabits and is the site of contradiction. Moreover, this subject, who, in order to act or speak, must necessarily participate in the overdetermination of ideologies which interpellate him or her, is perpetually put under pressure to conform to and play out numerous and often contradictory subject-positions. The subjectivity of this subject then is always precarious, as it is always in the process of change;

displaced across a range of incompatible and contradictory discourses.

It is this concept of the subject in and as a process that has appealed to feminist post-structuralists in describing the subject's formation in patriarchy and its possible resistance to it. Feminist post-structuralists such as Chris Weedon see the conceptual site of the subject as not only that place where meanings are fixed, but also a possible location for "potential revolution" (Weedon, 1987: 89). The recipe for this revolution follows thus: In that we are interpellated into numerous and different subject-positions throughout our lives, we are often in the situation of taking up subject-positions which contradict one another. As women, (of specifically Western capitalist nations), we participate in those liberal humanist discourses of freedom, self-reliance and independence. Simultaneously, or co-jointly, we are also, as women, interpellated into feminine discourses which offer submissiveness, passivity and dependence. And while we may take up these subject-positions which engender a feminine mode of subjectivity for patriarchy, we may also act within subject-positions which entail a feminist subjectivity. In the space of contradiction between these discourses and subjectivities, there is said to be resistance and struggle (against patriarchy).

The problem with this equation is that, while again

offering an anti-essentialist subject, and working against some of the essentialist tendencies of a cultural feminism, it essentializes conflict. It presumes that since, as decentered subjects dispersed across a multiplicity of discourses, contradiction is available to all, then resistance is also available to all. But not all contradiction demands politicization. And not all women are granted access to the same contradictions nor resistance. This equation is a form of pluralism, which in Gayatri Spivak's words, "hides an essentialist agenda", yet "traffic[s] in a radical textual practice of differences" (1988: 285). It occludes the different experiences of women in their differences of race, class and sexuality, and thus the possibility of contradiction which is made available to them and which does not necessarily precede resistance. Moreover, it precludes the possibility that the subjectivities of women are engendered differently.

In a similar vein, in taking the concept of the 'decentered' subject to its extreme, certain theorizations, both feminist and otherwise, have tended to essentialize 'difference'. Building upon Foucault's concept of the micro-physics of power - which refutes a monolithic notion of power to assert the non-hierarchical functioning of different powers - these theorizations place difference as solely the point of departure. What is proposed under this schemata is a wholly de-centered subject which is divorced from a hierarchical ordering of difference; from any claim

of origination or determination. Difference thus becomes conceptualized as sheer 'indifference' wherein the specificity of subjectivities, including gender, tend to become erased. While the de-centered subject is also an anti-essentialist subject, and thus attractive to certain feminist theorists, it is also endlessly dispersed across a radical heterogeneity of difference in ideology, language, and discourse: coming to rest nowhere. Differences collapse to matter to no one. What again becomes of struggle or attempts to win some space for change? What exists to be built upon? As Larry Grossberg writes, when "[a]gency is nothing but the product of the individual's insertion into various and contradictory codes of social practice: the speaker is always already spoken" (1986: 64). Such radical deconstruction slides towards eliding the specificity of gendered subjectivities, photographs, or discourses altogether.

I have summarized very briefly what are complex and elusive theories in order to return as quickly as possible to the photographic criticism which these theories have informed. To the extent that I have presented these theoretical constructs, and their liabilities, I am concerned with how they have not only instructed photographic criticism, but shaped its analytic and interpretive strategies. The positivity of post-structuralism for photographic criticism lies in the way it

forwards the articulated notion as ideology as larger, but no more powerful than, the collusion of photographs, discourses and individual subjects upon which it depends. Such a notion forces photographic critics to carefully disentangle the myriad factors at work in the historical present of a photograph. Its political positivity lies in the way in which it offers not only a method of deconstruction, but simultaneously suggests proactive lines of reconstruction.

Despite the space of uncertainty which post-structuralism proposes, certain predicates of its thought have been appropriated by photographic criticism in order to grant the latter some basis of certitude. In this respect, post-structuralism is used as a conceptual apparatus to posit the subject and photograph again in a priori or reflexive terms: as either pre-figured, or fragmented and intermittent. What is purloined from post-structuralism are not always its complexities, but the allowances often made for absolutism. I have focused thus on post-structuralism's limitations as well as positivities, for it is the former which has allowed photographic criticism to continue to circumscribe its object; more particularly to circumscribe the agency of subjective relations. Photographic criticism has trouble with the irrevocably unstable: it needs definitive ends in order to begin its explanations. Moreover, it needs stable and authoritative epistemological positions in order to retain a place outside and above the

photographic text in question. In general, this charge can be levelled against all forms of criticism.

The following chapters will examine in greater depth the appropriation of post-structuralism, (namely as it is informed by psychoanalytic theory and Athusserian and Foucauldian analysis), for such political imperatives. The remainder of this chapter is limited to a discussion of photographic criticism which works to suspend authoritative statements, whether appended to the photograph, the viewing subject, or the critic. This form of criticism locates its problematic squarely within the active processes of photographic mediation and subjectivity. In so doing, it disturbs formulaic notions which attribute the objectification of the photographic image to the 'distance' between spectator and photograph, or which claim identification with the photograph on the basis of strict homologous and pre-determined relations between spectator and image. Moreover, it is a form of inquiry which places itself within this relationship. Often derived and enunciated from the critic's own subjective experience, such writings explicitly trouble the relations of exteriority normally enacted by photographic criticism.

With the exception of one, the critics I suggest here are female and feminist. Without falling into another kind of essentialist trap, I can state that the stakes of subjectivity and photographic representation and theorizing

the uncertainties of experience have always been high for feminist critics. Involved in the double task of addressing the politics of the photographic objectification of women, these critics also point to the instability and confusion of subject and object positions such representation entails. Feminist critics of photographic representation work to bypass some of the more determinative aspects of photographic theorizing. Neither gender nor photography are given entities for these critics, but are instead seen as specific constructs which are formalizable only through a matrix of changing practices, histories and discourses. Their mode of analysis entails an ability to conceptualize photography, gendered subjectivity and experience without anchoring it one way or another. Nor do they subscribe to the belief in the totalization of language and textuality, to which most anti-essentialist analysts adhere. Emphasizing the historical dimension of photographs and subjectivities, these critics look to how individuals are both subjects and subjected to the social constructions of a photograph, while recognizing the fluidity of this process.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau's essay, "The Legs of the Countess" is an exemplary model of such critical work. In examining the profusion of photographs taken of the Countess de Castiglione by the Second Empire photographic firm of Mayer & Pierson, official photographers to the court of the Emperor Napoleon III, Solomon-Godeau is struck not only by "the frequency with which the countess presented herself to



the camera" (1986: 67), but also by the form which these representations often took. "What are we to make of the countess's having herself photographed in her chemise? Or exposing her legs?" (ibid.). While known for her beauty and briefly notorious as the emperor's mistress, the countess is no more outstanding than the majority of female court celebrities who were frequently photographed. However, the sheer quantity (over 400 photographs) and the remarkable personifications in which she had herself photographed ('en deshabillement', in masquerade, as drunken soubrette, or weeping within an empty picture frame), marks the exceptional nature of these images. More so, they lead Solomon-Godeau to claim that while they "were taken by a professional photographer, [they] could with some justice be perceived as having been authored by her" (ibid.: 70). And, "that it was the countess ... who directed the camera is no-where more evident than in the extraordinary group of photographs in which she removed her shoes and stockings, raised her petticoats, and crinoline, and had her naked legs photographed from several viewpoints" (ibid.: 74).

Solomon-Godeau is less interested in the impropriety of this gesture than she is in the ways it leads us to consider the problematic at work in the photographic self-representation of women. The countess's efforts to produce herself for the camera becomes the nexus of an investigation into the ways representations of the feminine intersect with

feminine self-representation. In arguing that "the logic of these images is not only that of a unique expression of the countess's obsessions, but that of a talisman of the culture that produced her" (ibid.: 67), Solomon-Godeau directs her inquiry to those historical and cultural conditions that allowed for these photographs.

In turning thus to the terms of articulation which circulate through the countess's photographs, Solomon-Godeau examines the changing material determinations (including uses of the camera) which impacted in various ways upon the 19th C. representation, and possible self-representation, of women. Focusing upon three sites of spectacle which constitute a "semiotic of the feminine" (ibid.: 67) - the prostitute, the dancer or actress, and the "beautiful, worldly woman" - Solomon-Godeau details their changing social construction, particularly as they are continuously formed by an androcentric culture. From this confluence, she find that the photographs of the countess may be the expression of one woman's investment in her image, but only to the extent that it has already been invested by patriarchal convention.

Despite the countess's authorship of her own presentation, then, we confront in these photographs a fundamental contradiction. In the very act of authoring her image - a position that implies individuality and a unique subjectivity - the countess can only reproduce herself as a work of elaborately coded femininity, a femininity which, as always, derives from elsewhere (ibid.: 76).

The liability of Solomon-Godeau's analysis lies in the

way it slides towards imputing the impossibility of a female subjectivity outside of the regime of male objectification. While she would like to grant "a critical space ... from which the woman can speak herself" (ibid.: 108), she cannot, for "the images of the countess in their entirety do not suggest her occupancy of such a space, not anything but a total embrace and identification with the look of the other" (ibid.). Yet, while offering only bleak designs to the conundrum of a woman's self-representation, Solomon-Godeau's essay is useful in the ways in which it considers the gendered construction of subjectivity and its relations to the apparatus of photography. In her detailed and complex mode of analysis, she begins the project of articulating the collusive and conflictual interchange between subjectivity and culture which cross-hatches the photographic image. However, the theoretical focus of this re-consideration, falling as it does upon this 'cross-hatching', directs its attention primarily to the mediating capacity of the photograph, rather than the specificity of the photographic object itself.

One of the most difficult political tasks which a feminist photographic practice and criticism undertakes is to describe female subjectivity in terms of a positively, rather than differentially, defined identity. To satisfy these ends, it must break with the founding fathers of post-structuralism and refute notions of subjectivity as a wholly textual practice which is already written. Subjectivity is

instead asserted as a provisional and contingent construction. But the means by which to register this contingency both photographically, and in critical writings, is troublesome, given the long-standing conventions of textuality which underlie both. In this respect, Theresa de Laurentis's writings on subjectivity and experience have been illuminating.

Defining experience "in the general sense of a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed" (1984: 159), de Laurentis explains subjectivity in terms of a continuously changing engagement with the world.

For each person, therefore, subjectivity is an on-going construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world. On the contrary, it is the effect of that interaction - which I call experience; and thus it is produced not by external ideas, values and material causes, but by one's own personal subjective engagement in the practices, discourses and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the events of the world (ibid.).

De Laurentis is not abandoning the view that we are constructed within discourse, but she offers alongside this notion a concept of dialectical positionality for the gendered subject. The advantage of this concept is that it escapes an essentialist notion of gendered subjectivity, while simultaneously advocating the constitution of subjectivity in its fluid relations to concrete historical practices, discourses and institutions. In articulating the production of signification to experience, and then to

subjectivity, de Laurentis moreover inserts a historical dimension to this concept, for the subject is not only constructed through present experiences, but past events. In terms of photographic representation then, gendered subjectivities can be seen as provisionally positioned both historically and semiotically. Both the past and the present give meaning to the photograph, and yet the photograph also spurs the memory and the present experience.

In writing of Shelagh Alexander's photo-montage work, whose images are culled from both public and private sources, the critic Elke Towne states:

It is possible to consider the three series of works that Shelagh Alexander has produced since 1982 - Hero; the untitled two-part series of diptychs in 1983; and the five recent works which constitute The Somnambulist series - as a triad of fictions concerned respectively with the myth of the hero, the authority and influence of family, and the pre-dominance of popular culture. Together they co-exist in the formation of an individual subject in society and consequently affect the definition of self. While the issues within these areas of investigation overlap and intermingle, the work has progressed methodically through an analysis of self in relation to all three. The work has changed from directly literal narrative to revealing autobiography. More recently, it appears more distanced, complex and analytical. It has come to focus less on obvious symbols and more on psychologically rich motifs that highlight the negotiations between past and present, memory and desire, self and other (1985: 10).

Finding Alexander's work to comment upon the confluence of discourses, myths and institutions which "[form] an individual subject in society and consequently affect the definition of the self", Towne evokes a concept of a subject constituted through language. Yet, in the manner in which

Alexander "[focuses] less on obvious symbols and more on ... the negotiations between past and present ..." Towne locates in this work the contingency and uncertainty of an articulated subject. Pulling away from a deconstruction of the stereotypes in photographic representations of women, Alexander's photo-montages direct Towne's attention to the fleeting and specific mergings of ideology, photography and subjectivity. Ideology reorganizes the photographic image, and positions the viewing and producing subject, but only insofar as the processes of this articulation are made intelligible by the subject herself. More so, it is Towne's claim that Alexander's work entails "an analysis of self in relation" to its experience of social practices which evokes most strongly the means by which subjects reposition themselves to produce meaning.

However, Towne's writing, more so than Solomon-Godeau's, tends to occlude considerations of the materiality of the photographic object. While Solomon-Godeau's essay precisely emphasized the historical and technological conditions of the photographic apparatus, this analysis is left absent in Towne's argument. In a post-structuralist approach which emphasizes only the constitution of subjectivity through and in representation, the question of how the photograph is constructed as a medium of representation is left in abeyance.

Yet, while agreeing that consciousness of self and

identity is reliant upon the differentiations of language, ("I" versus "you"), Towne's writing breaks with an orthodox post-structuralism which asserts the overall primacy of language over subjectivity. Alexander's photography represents not only the experience of semiotic interactions which constitute a subject, but also a subject who, by reflecting upon this experience, is able to partially reconstruct her own identity. It is in this way that Alexander's work, by asserting the positionality of subjectivity within a given historical context, also offers a subjectivity which, self-reflexively, remains open to future alterations.

This is a view that also falls in line with de Laurentis's claim that consciousness entails a "'critical method,' a specific mode of apprehension or 'appropriation' of reality" (1984: 185). For de Laurentis, "[t]his is where the specificity of a feminist theory may be sought: ... in that political, theoretical, self-analyzing practice by which the relations of the subject to social reality can be rearticulated from the historical experience of women' (ibid.: 186). This is also where a feminist photographic practice may be located: in the realization that the politics of a photograph is only identifiable within a constantly shifting context, and that the experiences of subjects who view and create these photographs can be actively utilized for the (re)construction of meaning.

The importance of this concept for critics lies in the

way it departs from a notion that the meaning of a photograph is only to be discovered and deconstructed. But to turn from the photographic object to the viewing subject entails its own set of difficulties for photographic criticism. Never entirely given over to the demands of photographic discourse, nor entirely immune to these demands, the viewing subject is both encumbered with the weight of ideology and image, and yet is inventive within this onus itself. Such a concept of the subject then forces critics to account for the specific historical constraints and experiences under which photographic meaning may or may not be produced. But such a concept, in extending into overlapping practices and relations which includes the institution of criticism itself, also, in this respect, visibly implicates the critic. The analytic distance which the critic once had to the photograph, and which made criticism's discourse so possible, is thus difficult to sustain under this conceptualization.

However, despite the claim that consciousness entails a "critical method", very few critics have been willing to consider the influence of their own historical experience in the production of criticism. While criticism cannot simply hang free from the concrete historical situations in which both it and its chosen photographic objects are derived and draw sustenance, neither can it turn to the experiential without a great deal of ideological violence. To insert the



critic into the area of inquiry is necessarily to change him or her into something fundamentally different. And herein lies the difficulty.

It is most likely in this respect that the work undertaken in Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida, (1981), while frequently cited by photographic critics, remains inoperable as an analytic methodology for most. Unsettling because the text utilizes the strategy of a mediated first-person, (an identitary "I" which is itself the product of ideological discourse), Camera Lucida also critically investigates the assemblage of photographic experience which constitutes that "I". This form of inquiry, which is derived and enunciated from one's own subjective experience, has important consequences for photographic critics in thinking through the validity of the 'experiential moment' for analyses of subjectivity and photographic mediation. Here, troubling echoes of intentionality, voluntarism and questions of authorship rise to the fore: complicating the theoretical assumptions of critics who have long subscribed to an anti-humanist faith. In making himself the conceptual measure by which this inquiry begins, Barthes does not separate his identity from the specificities of historical, social and cultural determinations, yet he attempts to explore the processes involved in the constitution of identity beyond any essential determinants. Neither collapsing the experience of photographic representation onto a dimension of interiority, nor looking solely to

society's powers of subjection to account for it, Barthes is interested in the reciprocal relations which take place within a paradox of visibility and imposture:

What I want, in short, is that my (mobile) image, buffeted among a thousand shifting photographs, altering with situation and age, should always coincide with my (profound) self; but it is the contrary which must be said: 'myself' never coincides with my image: for it is the image which is heavy, immobile, stubborn (which is why society sustains it), and 'myself' which is light, divided, dispersed ... 'myself' doesn't hold still ...

For the Photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity (1981: 12).

In this respect, Barthes' work in Camera Lucida precisely enlists the 'critical method of consciousness as a specific mode of apprehension or appropriation of reality'. And in this regard, it is also interesting that the only critic, to my mind, who has taken up Barthes's methodological agenda has been the feminist theorist Jane Gallop (1985).

In essence, Barthes's project of a 'subjective science' pushes one up against the limitations of previous theories of representation. Departing from post-structuralism's formulaic emphasis upon the 'contradictions' which lend 'agency' to the 'decentered' subject, Barthes is concerned with that which, while contributing to the subject's experience of photographic images, lies outside the strict purview of signification, (while still being connected to it). In this way, his text foregrounds the complication of discursive and affective relations effected by the

photographic apparatus, while disallowing any attempts to offer determinate or authoritative answers to these entanglements. For Barthes, the photographic effects its individuation by way of event and this demands following the capricious incidents which condition and continue from it. Yet, denying the certitude of explanations, except from an uncertain and transitory point of subjectivity, poses a weighty predicament for photographic critics. The predominant means by which critics have dealt with the dilemma posed by Camera Lucida has been to submit it to their own explanatory mechanisms, thus subduing and making accountable the unaccountable (cf. Burgin, 1986: 71-96).

In essence, Barthes' writing in Camera Lucida represents an extreme manifestation of his assertions in "Death of the Author". Refuting any attempts by the critic to decipher the text, Barthes emphasizes only the role of the reader: there is no meaning or structure except what the reader (himself) produces. "I am a primitive, a child - or a maniac; I dismiss all knowledge, all culture, I refuse to inherit anything from another eye than my own" (1981: 51). And yet, throughout his writings, Barthes has consistently presented his self as an irresolute assemblage of letters and language. "Do I not know that, in the field of the subject, there is no referent? ... I am the story which happens to me" (1977: 60/56). This contradiction embodies both the attraction and repulsion of Camera Lucida for

photographic and post-structuralist critics. The attraction lies in the way that Barthes himself presents a subject who, in viewing photographs, is neither quite an interpellated subject who strictly complies with the exactments of ideology, nor an individual who freely walks through life, deaf to any ideological hailing. The aversion lies in the way Barthes does not allow this contradiction to become suppressed by certain formulations, propositions, or assured statements: in the primacy of the reader, there is no room for the critic.

A case in point which illustrates the critic's troubled relationship with Camera Lucida may be found in Paul Smith's text Discerning the Subject (1988). While Smith is not a photographic critic, his text, as a meta-critical account of theoretical conceptualizations of subject, certainly represents a new take on the older composition of post-structuralism. But what is of interest in Smith's book is the manner in which it is characteristic of (photographic) criticism's treatment of Camera Lucida: which at once champions the text for its complex uncertainties and simultaneously attempts to tame this complexity through an understandable structure of dualistic opposition.

Undertaking a series of offensive forays across a number of different, but inter-related discursive territories, Smith recovers from each matters pertaining to 'the subject'. With every attempt at reclamation, he finds

complaint with his prize. Each 'subject' found - from within Marxism, post-Marxism, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism, or psychoanalytic theory - is found lacking. Intrinsic to his critique of those processes of abstraction which he calls the "cerning of the subject" (ibid.: xxx), Smith charges that the humanistic sciences have traditionally theorized or inherited ('cern'-ed) a subject which is limited in its whole or undifferentiated constitution ('cerne'-ed). For Smith, it is precisely this formalizing tendency, (the 'cerning' of the subject), which has acted to close down the possibilities of effective human agency. In breaking open the divisive coherency of the term 'subject', Smith wants to emphasize "A person [who] is not simply an actor who follows ideological scripts, but is also an agent who reads them in order to insert him/herself into them - or not" (ibid.: xxxv).

Thus Smith finds a post-structuralist champion in Barthes, whose investigations into "the imponderable which constitutes me" (Barthes, in Smith, ibid.: 102), describe "the tension between the desire to be the proper and coherent ideological 'subject' and the sense of its actual fictionality" (ibid.: 106). Drawing upon Camera Lucida to illustrate this point, Smith foregrounds Barthes' central concept of the photographic properties of studium and punctum, (which he mistakenly makes analogous to the dyads plaisir/jouissance and Julia Kristeva's symbolic/semiotic),

in order to describe the "mutually enabling dialectic" in which the restrained and inventive processes of subjectivity are articulated.

(Barthes'] readings of photographs crosses two moments. On the one hand, there is a studium type of reading which entails pleasure and where that pleasure is dependent upon the viewer taking up the subject-position proffered by the photograph. This pleasure is, in a sense, one of identification with the law - a phallic pleasure one might say. On the other hand, there is a punctum type of reading. The punctum reading involves the sense of a subjectivity inscribed athwart of the 'subject's' identificatory urge. In other words, and reductively, the studium is read through codes and sets in place the fixed, ideological 'subject'; whereas the punctum does not respond to those codes and displaces the 'cerned' subject. Codes, of course, are never allowed to speak our desire; they are intrinsically totalitarian in that respect, since they take our place and speak for us; the punctum problematizes such a presumption.

This distinction is, of course, not to be understood undialectically (ibib.: 107).

In many respects, Smith misrepresents Barthes' interpretation of these two elements whose co-presence constitutes the latter's interest, or "adventure" found, in particular photographs. This distortion, I think, is not accidental, and is in fact based upon an undue emphasis which contrasts a "totalitarian" notion of social symbolic forces with an agential notion of the individual.

Principally revealing is Smith's assertion that "codes never allow us to speak our desire". As that aspect of a photograph which is congruent with common knowledge and with culture, the studium, dependent upon a shared ground of meaning and experience, relies upon the viewer to take up the subject-positions offered and is indeed "ultimately

always coded" (Barthes, 1981: 27). And yet Barthes writes of the studium as "that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste" (ibid.). Certainly, the conventionality of the studium does not exclude desire, perhaps even "our desire".

Moreover, while a photograph which is all studium is a "docile" photograph (Barthes), it does not necessarily follow that it "sets in place a fixed ideological subject". In that more than one subject-positions may be available in the photograph, (and this is usually the case), there is the possibility of multiple readings whose very differences contradict one another. Barthes' emphasis regarding the studium photograph was not upon its powers of fixity, but rather, as a "docile" photograph, it stays "fixed" within the representational frame. Here, desire, sexuality, and memory may exist, but only to circulate within the parameters of the photograph. While nothing seeps beyond the field of the image, and everything is fastened down to various codes and conventions, it does not necessarily correspond that the subject is strictly bound to this post. Smith seemingly wants to draw a hard line between "our desire" and those that are spoken for us. In the end, and despite Smith's assertions that it is "not to be understood undialectically", this distinction is much more complex than Smith makes it out to be.

In an appropriate manner, Smith's representations of the punctum is much less reliant upon a complex "dialectic"

than Barthes' original conception. While Smith describes the "punctum reading" as that which "involves the sense of a subjectivity inscribed athwart of the subject's identificatory urge", Barthes' approach is much more reciprocal, and ultimately, "dialectical". In fracturing and disturbing the studium, the punctum reaches beyond the frame and "rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me" (Barthes, 1981: 26). It is an "accident which pricks" (ibid.). And while Barthes early on describes the punctum in terms of something aggressive, (a "wound", a "prick", an "arrow"), to which the viewer is a passive recipient, he later clarifies the reciprocal roles which the viewer and photograph enact in order to bring life to the punctum. The punctum occurs not because of what takes place in the photograph, nor is it necessarily dependent upon what is represented for the viewer. Rather, it occurs precisely because a relation of mutual animation takes place between the viewer and the photograph; a relation of reciprocity in which there is a complex of both activity and passivity. "I animate the photograph and it animates me" (ibid.: 59). This then is an animation which lies neither quite wholly with the viewer, nor with the photograph, but occupies some very conflicted and dynamic relationship between the two.

Smith, on the other hand, and again despite his protestations to the contrary, places the movement of the



punctum as being more dependent upon the viewing subject. His reading of the punctum "involving the sense of a subjectivity inscribed athwart of the 'subject's' identificatory urge" is much more reminiscent of Kristeva's semiotic crossing of the symbolic than the reciprocal relations of Barthes. In describing subjectivity as "athwart", the co-dependency upon which this "inscription" is based is erased to a faint trace.

As well, Smith disregards the possibility that the "dialectical" relationship he describes is not always readily at hand for any particular subject. As an "accident that pricks", the punctum is a contingent causality. But in order for this accident to happen there must first be a contract with the conventionality of representational systems in order to throw these same systems into crisis. "The punctum is what I add to the photograph, and what is nonetheless already there" (Barthes, 1981: 55). As Smith realizes, this interdependent relationship could indeed be described as "dialectical", in that studium and punctum intimately interlace in order to produce an effect/affect of displacement; to produce something which leads outside of the frame. But what he omits is that this collusion of dependence and independence is one which can never be discerned ahead of its time. It happens by accident. "It is not possible to posit a rule of connection between the studium and the punctum (when it happens to be there). It is a matter of co-presence, that is all one can say"

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(Barthes, 1981: 42).

The movement of the punctum cannot be separated from its conflictual relations with the studium, and in this sense, neither its disruptive activity, nor the nature of this disruption, can be determined beforehand. The particular effect of the punctum can only be recognized in its wider congruence and specificity. For it resides not in the contemplator, nor in the photograph, but in the specific form of the active relations between the two.

Balancing precariously upon a fulcrum of undecidability, the merit of Barthes' writing in Camera Lucida lies in the way he emphasizes the vital roles which both photograph and viewer play in the production of signification. Equally important is that the collusion of photograph and viewing subject gives way to no prerogative but its own. Both photograph and spectator disrupt and temper each other's authoritative powers, and in the process, they disappoint the interpretative attempts of critics to legislate this process. Thus, any tendency to privilege the spectator as the producer of meaning of the photograph is matched by the recognition of the photograph's discursive authorities. The result is a complex and elusive articulation which, while drawing attention to itself, refuses any effort to master its signifying relations through systemic investigation.

In this respect, Smith's misrepresentations of Camera

Lucida are quite telling of his (frustrated) attempts to critically occupy Barthes' text. Moreover, it is indicative of the authoritative strategies of photographic criticism as a whole. What Smith wants from his 're-reading' is precisely to posit some form of rule by which to explain Barthes' complicated description of the interaction between photograph and subject. Yet this is an interaction which escapes the intentionality of both photograph and subject and the intentions of the critic. Despite Barthes' assertion that, " what I can name cannot really prick me. The incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance" (Barthes, 1981: 51), Smith seeks to suppress the epistemological difficulty which such a symptom poses. In naming this disturbance in terms of opposition, he denies the accidental and undecidable connections which such a disorder entails.

Where his aversion to the anomaly of lives and photographs presented in Camera Lucida becomes most pronounced is in his discussion of the way in which Barthes' personalized memories of his mother are woven into the book. In his critique of the identity "'I' as a "fictional representation, a colligation and suturing of a collection of imaginary identities" (1988: 108), Smith espouses Barthes' concern in Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes (1977b), as "clearly to find a way of escaping that realm of the imaginary, to continually displace the identifications that settle their and fix us" (Smith, 1988: 110). And yet,

he finds that Camera Lucida inevitably embraces such an "imaginary lure":

... the acceptance of imaginary stasis is to be found in Barthes' final book, La Chambre Claire, which confronts the content of the imaginary with the good object par excellence, the mother. That is to say, the book deals with photography and the imaginary ostensibly, but with the death of Barthes' mother actually. It is also inscribed 'In homage to Sartres' L'Imaginaire' and seems to constitute finally some kind of defense of the imaginary against all the 'I's' that are constituted by the act of reading images. It is a book that is in part content to gainsay all those 'I's' by adopting a comfortable and comforting position in relations to the imaginary (ibid.: 112).

In this, Smith shares with other photographic critics, (eg. Burgin, 1986: 71-96), a propensity to explain and tame the entirety of Camera Lucida through a psychoanalytic reading which leads back (as always) into the embrace of the mother. And in this manner, his critical determinisms are revealing. Contained within the methodological strategy laid out by psychoanalytic theory, Barthes' specific engagement with these photographs becomes nothing but a replay of a transhistorical desire: particularly desire for the mother. Smith now finds that, "... the place of the mother has been espied as the very locus of resistance" (1988: 113). Having located "the good object" of Barthes' mother as the singular referent to which all can be assigned, the historicity of experiences from which Barthes' subjectivity produces and is reproduced by photographic texts is negated. The uncertainty of this articulated subject in process is thus annuled under a critical methodology which guarentees its

statements through a universal constant. And in this, the political possibilities offered by a concept which espouses the provisional construction of subjectivity and signification is also rescinded.

Clearly, for photographic critics, 'the impossibility of representation' of and in Barthes' text poses certain epistemological and textual difficulties. For the punctum, as that "unexpected flash which crosses the field" (Barthes, 1981: 59), - the lacerating wound of detail or the intensity of time - lies beyond criticism's grasp. There is with the punctum an excess of feeling which spills over the frame: moving too quickly to be adequately caught by language, its description turns upon a passionate flight of metaphor. While Barthes writes that "the incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance", this disturbance travels far in its incapacitating effects. Inquiring into the present moment of the punctum, within which no definite direction may be discerned, the critic may speak of the 'it' or the 'I', but not of that which is really at stake inbetween. Is not this lapse of language at the heart of the punctum?

Barthes too appears to fall prey to the challenges posed by the indescribable. There is a point in his writing where the motile co-presence of studium and punctum become captured within a frozen binarism: the social 'it' and the imaginary 'I'. It is at the end of the book where this petrification of a formally mobile process becomes most

conspicuous:

Mad or Tame? Photography can be one or the other: tame if its realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits (to leaf through a magazine at the hairdressers, the dentists); mad if this realism is absolute and, so to speak original, obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time: a strictly revulsive movement which reverses the course of the thing and which I shall call, in conclusion, the photographic ecstasy ... The choice is mine (1981: 119).

With this statement, Barthes appears to retreat from the conflictual ground of a social and subjective semiotic to privilege individual choice as the decisive factor for this "strictly revulsive moment which reverses the course of the thing". Faced with the specific epistemological problems inherent in a 'subjective science' such as his, he returns to the subject - himself - an unforeseen degree of control. And in that he speaks from his own experience, and only of those photographs which attract him, he makes himself not only "the measure of photographic knowledge", but its master as well. He distances himself from the activity of experience.

The difficulties then, of Barthes' text, appear to entrap not only his critics - leading them to devise strategies for certainty - but Barthes himself. And the dilemma which Camera Lucida poses in its eloquent manner, is not only epistemologically, but politically problematic. For it seems as though that assemblage of subjectivities, experiences, discourses and photographs which constitute the production and reproduction of photographic meaning is also

that which remains most inaccessible. The important elucidation which Camera Lucida attempts - that of the complexity, difficulty and opacity of a subjectivity informed by images and things - seems uncommunicatible in its complexity. There is something extremely asocial in the movement of the punctum - it can happen only for some one, (Barthes) - even while its movement is dependent upon the social field of the photograph. While it militates against a photograph's discursive powers of truth and origins, it also slides towards a narcissistic idealization of the individual; one who is incapable of consensus and whose truth shall stand alone. As Dick Hebdige speaks of a closely related Sublime, "The stress upon the impossible tends ... to seriously limit the scope and definition of the political (where politics is defined as the 'art of the possible')" (1987: 68).

In order to recover the possibility of politics, that process which is at the heart of the reciprocal relations between a subject and a photograph must be readdressed. Indeed, it is this reciprocal relation itself which offers the way out of the bind of asociality. As I have attempted to illustrate in this chapter, aspects of post-structuralist theory have directed certain photographic critics to the negotiations between subjects and photographs; a conveyance enacted by a borrowing from and building upon different experiences, subjectivities, histories and photographs. It

is in this recognition of negotiation that a possible politics may be discerned. For while the movement of the punctum pushes one against the limits of language, it cannot be unanchored from the social base of language itself; that ground upon which politics and the punctum are continually made and re-made. Such is the impossibility of the punctum which offers the possibility of ever-renewed experience; to reflect upon this exchange as Barthes has done is to go beyond that which already exists to bring that which is momentarily attainable into being.

Crucially, it is the interaction of experiences, subjectivities, and photographic representation - unaccountable in itself as an epistemological object - which ensures that the meanings and effects of a photograph have no primordial fixity or unity. And it is the uncertainty of this articulation which offers the possibility of a reconstructive politics. However, the epistemological impracticability of this contingency has led critics to seek their explanations elsewhere. The following chapter shall look to how psychoanalytic theory represents not only an important approach for photographic critics investigating relations of photography and subjectivity, but also a another strategy to assuredly argue a particular explanation for this relation.



## Footnotes

1. The British journal Screen was extremely influential during the mid to late seventies for the manner in which it introduced and addressed the configuration of subjectivity, ideology and visual (particularly cinematic) representation. While concerned primarily with film, and most predominantly at this time with the subject-positions demanded by the 'classic realist text', Screen also acted as an important forum by which to consider other media, including photography. Moreover, as Screen was especially involved in the articulation of psychoanalytic theory to film criticism, - as evidenced in its Spring 1975 issue which introduced Christain Metz's "The Imaginary Signifier", and was followed in the succeeding issue by Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", (Summer 1975) - it was also particularly receptive to works on photography, such as Burgin's, which entailed a psychoanalytic approach.

2. For a more detailed discussion of the application of Lacan to textual analysis, see: Kaja Silverman. The Subject of Semiotics. Oxford University Press, New York: 1983.

3. It must be recalled that Althusser's noted ISA essay was in fact only a published extract from a never completed manuscript entitled "De la superstructure". For further discussion of Althusser's model. see Gregory Elliot. Althusser: The Detour of Theory. Verso, London: 1987.

4. 'Screen theory' is the term commonly given to that body of work which emerged from the journals Screen and Screen Education during the mid to late seventies. While drawing from a number of different theoretical fields, 'Screen theory' relied predominantly upon Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to explain the relationship of language, ideology and 'the subject', particularly as this relationship is enacted within the purview of filmic representation.

5. Kristeva's concepts of the 'symbolic' and the 'semiotic', are distinct from Barthes' 'punctum' and 'studium' in that they are based upon psychoanalytic theory and semiotics for their theorization. For Kristeva, the symbolic is the systematic order of language - the site of signification which constructs and is constructed within dominant codes of ideology - and the semiotic is that which - both created and repressed by the symbolic (and likened to those infantile bodily drives which are repressed as a child enters into the social world - succeeds at different moments to displace and transgress the symbolic; bypassing and subverting its codes of discourse.

Moreover, Smith is not alone in his reduction of Barthes' co-dependent concepts. For those subscribe to psychoanalytic theory, this tendency to place the movement of the punctum upon the actions of 'the subject' is particularly pronounced. Such a determination is of course crucial to a methodology which by necessity must begin its analysis from the foundation of a 'subject's' psychical processes. See for instance this re-working of Barthes' studium and punctum in Christian Metz's "Photography and Fetish" (1985), or in Victor Burgin's "Re-Reading Camera Lucida" in his The End of Art Theory (1986).

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## Chapter Five

### Wishful Thinking: Victor Burgin's Photographic Subject

Pliny tells the story of a young woman, a potter's daughter. She was in love with a young man, who was shortly to leave her to go on a long journey. As they were saying their goodbyes, in a room lit by a single lamp, she took a piece of charcoal and traced the outline of her lover's shadow on the wall. What Pliny's myth suggests is that the origin of the graphic image is in the portrait, and that the origin of the portrait is in the desire for protection against the loss of the object, and the loss of identity - and certainly it seems that the historical origin of the portrait is in funerary sculpture. So to introduce considerations of desire into the story of the invention of photography is necessarily to construct a definition of 'apparatus' that pushes the invention of photography back beyond the nineteenth century (Victor Burgin, 1989: 4-5).

It may seem logical that to speak of an invention is, in a similar manner, to contrive of an origin in order to speak assuredly of a meaning or a motive. To tell a story of invention then, would be to base the superiority of an explanation upon the location of decisive moments or sources. As this thesis explicates, the history of photography has had its share of inventive explanations.

Of course, formalist explanations which seek to account for photography as an object of knowledge are themselves constructed within a particular domain of representation. To repeat what has now become tautological, there is no knowledge outside of representation, and to this end, the object of photography both determines and is the effect of the objectives of a much larger apparatus. The 'truthful'

assertion of the transparency of the 'real' world and the human agent thus becomes a tendentious argument for a particular rationality. In this manner, the explanation of photography as a product of a desire (to capture or express) can itself be seen as the product of a desire for epistemological or political authority. To base a meaning upon an origin, therefore, is already to have the meaning in mind.

At first glance, the above quotation from Victor Burgin may seem to impute a similiar explanatory discourse. For this compelling allegory of romantic desire also locates the wish to preserve a fleeting object or identity as an instigating or even originating factor of photography's motives. And it too appears to place the photograph as a record of a reality refracted through a sensibility. But as a theorist and an artist who works generally on the politics of representation, and specifically upon photography's complex of social, cultural and subjective mediation, Burgin's project operates toward quite different political ends.

One striking aspect of discord in Burgin's re-telling of Pliny's tale is exactly who it is who traces the outlines of the object of desire. For this is the story of a desirous woman; a person who, in her different gendering, (representation and self-representation), has more often than not been depicted as an object of desire, rather than a desiring subject. Thus, that it is a woman who exacts

objectification may perhaps alone mark this story's difference, and hence the terms of its articulation from its more typical predecessors. But at the same time, the site of this desiring female subject is still inscribed by customs which make her less an artist than a copyist. And this woman who traces out the image of her (soon to be) absent lover is herself made a spectacle for particular theoretical ends. She is made a site for citation.

Given that theories constitute their own objects, and moreover that it is the quality of discourse to produce the 'subjects' appropriate to it, the nature of this exception is remarkable only in degree to that theoretical construct which figures it. The point here is not simply to sketch out differences. Certainly Burgin, like others past and present, has done enough in debunking the inherited wisdoms of reflection and expression-based criticism to assure that his theoretical intentions lie elsewhere. It is quite doubtful then that he has the same meanings in mind. But in asking "what's the difference", we very often run up against some of the same limitations of previous explanations. And while this too is not surprising, it does compell us to precisely start measuring exceptions only by their degree of difference from a common foundation: a desire for certitude. For while the superiority of the accounts of photographic criticism are now dependent precisely upon a refusal of the theology of origins, aspects of a transhistorical or

transcultural evangelism still exist. As the complexity of the theoretical situation now demands that there can be no master referent named, there is still a proclivity to name and explain, assuredly. To ask how far Burgin has strayed off this desirous base then is not simply to measure his correct distance from an empiricist or idealist photographic epistemology. Rather, one can only ask, given his theoretical construction of the object of photography, and the subjects he has deemed appropriate to it, how far does this degree of exception go?

This chapter looks to how certain aspects of psychoanalytic theory have directed photographic criticism. In basing itself largely upon the basis of Victor Burgin's critical writings and photographs, it will examine the liabilities and positivities of this approach. Insofar as recent photographic criticism is concerned with the apprehension of sexual difference through and in photographic imagery, psychanalytic theory has been especially influential. More so, it has held decisive importance for feminist critics and photographers. In critiquing assumptions of a feminine identity as unproblematically given, and unpacking the socially coded processes through which sexed subjectivity is produced, psychoanalytic theory has enabled feminist critics to spell out not only the assignment of subjectivities through photography, but also, to divert or interrupt this assignation through certain uses of the medium.



Additionally, the use of psychoanalytic theory crosses other lines. For those who have employed its mode of analysis are, again, not only theorists and critics of photography, but photographic practitioners or artists as well. This category of theorists/critics/photographers includes not only Burgin, but Mary Kelly, Yve Lomax, Marie Yates, Ray Barrie, and certain 'students' of Burgin from the Polytechnic of Central London in the 1970's.<sup>(1)</sup> This use of psychoanalytic theory in not only critical writings, but photographic practices, promises an expanded politics for the uses and theorization of photographic representation. As Burgin has stated, "There is no reason why my theoretical writing should not be read as a series of captions to my visual works ... For me, to be involved in 'theory' simply means to be committed to thinking and re-thinking the basis of one's own practice" (1987b: 57/58).

However, there are difficulties which the appropriation of psychoanalytic theory poses: both in terms of the critical writing it has informed and the photographic practice it orientates. In regards to the latter, the inclusion of the language of psychoanalytic theory into photographic practices has often produced works that are as obtuse as the theory which motivates them. As one interviewer of Burgin wryly comments, "its come to a pretty pass if you need to know all this to approach the work" (Godfrey, 1982: 22). Moreover, the 'difficulty' of these

works has tended to produce its own 'canon', whose players or performers are only admitted via indoctrination into the exclusive space of an abstract theory. As Steve Edwards caustically writes of the "Burgin school":

For an approach which makes so much of difference it produces a sameness, a practical homogeneity unrivalled by anything but the 19th century academy. It has created a house style of enigmatic, tangential text combined with studio images typically modeled on, or incorporating, the painted image of a woman. Are we seriously to believe that the female subject is produced by magazine advertisements? Or consider Burgin's own anti-photographic photography. A practice in which ever more sophisticated readings of feminist readings of Lacan's reading of Freud produce a work dazzled by its own (thoroughly hermetic) brilliance. A project which set out to challenge the art school idea of 'private language' comes about as close to that philosophical absurdity as anyone is likely to get (1989: 15).

The hermeticism of these photographic practices is also politically shadowed by the critical writing which deploys and accompanies them. Premised upon the keystone of sexual difference, photographic criticism utilizing psychoanalytic theory to explain the bearings of sexed subjectivity and photography is limiting and limited by certain of its assumptions. At root is a predisposition to view all subjectivities and identities as defined in differential relation to or against the meter of male desire. In accounting for the engendering of subjectivity, representation, and self-representation through consistent reference to signifiers of masculinity, such photographic criticism tends to disallow other propositions which may see this construction as equally activated by other present and

historical cultural factors. In this respect, criticism informed by psychoanalytic theory can also be closed off to alternative interpretations voiced by those who are not white, male, Western or, most noticeably, heterosexual.

This question of the exclusivity of a 'psychoanalytic' photographic criticism also, extemporaneously, foregrounds disputes over what constitutes photographic criticism or photographic theory. Throughout this thesis, I have been using the two definitions somewhat co-terminously: photographic criticism, even as it borrows theories from which to inform and authorize its statements, cannot be distinguished from photographic theory. I find it interesting then that Burgin has consistently attempted to drive a wedge between the two; specifically between what is seen as the hardened "value-judgements" of criticism against a more fluid and correct "photographic theory" (Burgin, 1984). While this distinction is not introduced thoughtlessly, but addresses a particular historical problem of (art) criticism, it is troubling that Burgin still persists with this distinction. More recently, he has pulled this discrimination between critical journals themselves:

Perhaps the problem is that October has never been a theory magazine, at least in the sense in which, for example, Screen, in the 1970's, was a theory magazine. October has espoused a number of critical projects, but it has never espoused a consistent theoretical project. It has rather been a platform for critics who read theory, but define themselves as critics (1987a: 63).

What is interesting, ironic even, is that Burgin

appears to desire uniformity for the project of photographic theory, when he himself admits that "to be involved in 'theory' simply means to be committed to thinking and re-thinking the basis of one's own practice". The irresolution of theory which constantly revises its inquiries in the face of ever changing historical developments is thus disavowed in the privileging of a "consistent theoretical project" over an oscillating critical "platform". Burgin's example of Screen in the 1970's is most telling in this respect, for Screen at this time, contrary to Burgin's argument, was quite heterogeneous in its theoretical debates. And while it culminated in the paradigmatic body named "Screen theory", it is clear that Burgin appropriates this body of work as a received paradigm to be imported into a 'photographic theory'. Yet, through its operations of theoretical thefts and historical contingencies, no theory, be it photographic or otherwise, constitutes an autonomous discipline. As even Burgin has pointed out, "photography theory has an object of its own only in the very minimal sense that it is concerned with signifying practices in which still images are used by an instrumentality more automatic than had been previous ways of producing images" (1984: 65). It also clearly can claim no methodology which is peculiar to itself. Given that it draws from a wide variety of theoretical approaches, it can only be described as a "particular emphasis within a general history and

theory of representation" (ibid).

It would seem then that October, in "espousing a number of critical projects", falls more gracefully in line with the historical and changing 'particular emphases' of photographic theory. My point in taking this collateral excursion is that Burgin's statements of exclusion governing what is and isn't photographic criticism and theory reveals a certain desire for 'consistent' authoritative explanations. Moreover, it is especially Burgin's appropriation of psychoanalytic theory to his critical and theoretical writings and photographic works which exemplifies this desire. Burgin's elevation of 'theory' to that which is somehow more coherent, rigorous and authoritative than criticism, invokes an authority for his own use, and his own voice, of psychoanalytic theory. Just as Burgin has removed himself from those "critics who read theory", and thus displaced theory from the specific constraints and changes of historical events, so too has he represented and exempted psychoanalytic theory from the disruptive effects of change. And in this, his strategies for an authoritative photographic epistemology are more indicative of the complaints he levels against 'criticism' (as somehow parasitical of theory) than anything else. For Lacan's critique of an essential subject is attractive to photographic critics precisely in the way it allows a photographic theory and politics founded on innovation and change - where change re-emerges unexpectedly. And yet

under Burgin's theorizations this emphasis upon inconstancy is lost and with it, the theory's emphasis upon historical mutability.

To outline the history of Burgin's own work is in some respects to follow the trajectory of this loss. Beginning in the mid-seventies, Burgin's photographic and written work represented a conscious attempt at undoing the predominately mystificatory and conservative discourses of both the art institution and society as a whole. In doing so, he emphasized the notion of photography as a text in which social and cultural relations are materially active rather than statically codified. In producing and reproducing the image-world, photography was seen as both the product and the process of ideological reproduction. Quite obviously, to 'think photography' as Burgin had here, demanded a theoretical analysis based upon both semiology and marxist criticism. But such an analysis only accentuated the subject of photographic representation, rather than the human subject's relation to such representation.

Burgin's emphasis was thus to shift from a theoretical accounting of seamless structures and subjects to a much more convoluted investigation into the volatile energies exchanged between subject and photograph. Spectating subjects came to be understood as not simply (either voluntarily or compulsorily) accepting or rejecting the meanings offered, but laboring to make meanings. This

concept of the production of signification, while de-naturalizing meaning, also, out of necessity, included a notion of how human beings are themselves produced; 'positioned' by different systems of representation and knowledge. For, just as we work to make sense of images, we are also worked over by these very representations: 'interpellated' or set into places of recognition for and by ideology. The variability of representations and subject positions, the diverse differences between them, thus signals the impossibility of harmoniously amassing or fixing a subject's relation to photographic signification.

Meaning is only ever produced in difference, and the final closure of meaning is only ever deferred...Meaning is never simply 'there' for our consumption, it is only ever produced in a process of substitution of one term for another in a potentially limitless series. (Burgin, 1986: 112).

Obviously, it becomes all the more difficult to invest or project a coherency of identity to this uncertain and ambivalent action. Rather than a simple codification of text, what we are faced with is an open space of intertextuality, where numerous associations, provoked by things known and seen, overlap and interweave one another to produce conjunctural moments of meaning. Yet the meaning of this specific confluence does not evolve spontaneously. In engaging with other texts outside of itself, the photographic image is always contingent with other sites of meaning production at a given place. And it is also importantly contingent with the particular investments of a

given subject.

For Burgin, the polysemous potential of intertextuality does appear to have its limits (or origins). And where this limit lies is in 'the subject' itself. Taking up Althusser's thesis that ideology always functions through the category of the 'subject', Burgin lays particular emphasis upon photography's reproduction of the constituted subject as its effect and articulation. "Such operations upon meaning [eg. the intertextual capacity of a photograph] are those of an 'individual', but the founding unity of this subject exists only in ideology" (Burgin:1986: 17). Thus Burgin poses the problem of ideology, (the politics of representation), squarely and exclusively at the level of 'the subject'. Ideology is not only what constitutes individuals as well-meaning 'subjects', but is itself constituted and reproduced by those very 'subjects' it issues. For Burgin then, any theory of ideology or "progressive" politics "cannot be indifferent to subjective experience" (1986: 113). And the contributions of psychoanalytic theory in this respect cannot be ignored.

[T]heories of representations ... demand a sociology, a social history, a political economy and a semiotics of the image, and they are concerned with what 'common-sense tells us about an image. However, it has been objected that such theories are unable to account for those meanings which are 'subjective' - irreducibly individual, inviolably private; moreover, it has been maintained that, at least in respect of art, it is these meanings which are the most important ... It is partly in response to this lacuna of theory that, in recent years, a psychoanalytically-informed semiotics has been evolved ...



psychoanalytic theory does not construct a realm of the 'subjective' apart from social life, it is a theory of the internalization of the social as 'subjective' - and, as such, has profound implications for any theory of ideology (Burgin, 1986: 112-113).

In breaking away from strict structuralist semiotics towards a 'psychoanalytically-informed' one, Burgin's formulation took up the propositions of 'Screen theory', which was itself forwarded by the journals Screen and Screen Education during this time (mid - late seventies). Primarily concerned with film texts and practices, 'Screen theory' set forth a number of challenging debates pertaining to the relationships between film, ideology and the spectating subject. Informed by the diverse and interrelated proposals of Christian Metz's Lacanian film theory, and Julia Kristeva and Michel Foucault's semiotic and discourse theories, it also drew principally from the postulates of Althusser's theory of ideology and the 'interpellated subject' and Lacan's psychoanalytic critique of the subject's formation in language. Taking his cue from 'Screen theory', it was also from the latter that Burgin was to extract his writings and his photographic works concerning the relationship of photography, subjects and subjectivities.

Numerous critiques have been leveled against 'Screen theory', particularly in regards to what Steve Neale has characterized as its 'abstract text-subject relationship' (1977). As Stuart Hall writes, "'Screen theory' seems to

have fallen prey to the temptation to treat the most abstract/universal level of abstraction as the most pertinent - indeed, the only 'truly theoretical' - level of explanation" (1980: 161). In many respects, Burgin's critical and photographic practice follows this line; evidenced not only in his previously mentioned distinction of theory and criticism, but also in photographic works such as In Lyon, 1980; Gradiya, 1982; Olympia, 1982; or The Bridge, 1984; works which not only repeat 'Screen theory's interest in filmic texts, but also its abstracted explanations of the "psychopathology of everyday representations" (Burgin, 1986: 113).

Yet, the concern here lies less with how this highly abstracted work came to pass, than what its political ramifications are in terms of the explanations it offers. Burgin has taken up the propositions of Althusser and Lacan namely because their anti-essentialist positions allow him to stress the unstable and dynamic productivity of photographic representation and subjectivity. And yet, in following the path laid down by 'Screen theory', he has also tended to reproduce the liabilities of each.

The importance of Althusser's theorizations for Burgin lies in the latter's rejection of both the centrality of human agents as the self-constituted subjects of history and an economist or historicist view of history. Quite clearly, both rejections allow Burgin to similarly refuse the conventional histories and theories of photographic

production. Yet, both Burgin and 'Screen theory' have tended to adapt the more functional aspects of Althusser's propositions; wherein any difference between the constitution of 'the subject' and its interpellation into specific discursive positions is elided. Where this skewed emphasis becomes clear is in Burgin's partial quoting of Althusser, "All ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (1986: 17). He then uses this incomplete excerpt to depart into photography/ideology's specular relation with the subject via Lacan's description of the 'mirror-stage'. Yet, the longer version of Althusser's sentence encompasses a much more manifold explanation which places the 'subject' as a discursive category: "the category of subject is only constitutive of all ideology in so far as ideology has the function (which defines it), as 'constituting' concrete 'individuals' as subjects" (1971) (my emphasis). With this proviso, which Burgin has crucially (to his argument) ignored, much more ambiguity can be awarded to the problematic of discursive positioning. While I in no way wish to hold Althusser as promoting a fine example of possible 'non-correspondence' between discourse and 'the real', there is an ambiguity here which holds forth the possibility of 'struggle' at the intersection between subject and text (photograph), or between an individual not yet made a 'subject' to discursive positioning.

For Burgin (and 'Screen theory'), there is no site of struggle here because the subject in general and the subject enlisted to the positioning of discursive formations is already collapsed. The possible differences, and hence contradictions between them do not exist, as the 'subject' is already conceived as seamlessly woven into (or, if not, then 'already there for'), subject-positions. Moreover, as David Morley points out, the struggle between the interplay of the subject and discourse is also exempted because "contradictory positions have already been determined at the psychoanalytic level" (1980:164). This distinction is also explicit in Burgin's construction of the subject's relation to visual representation. To return to the general foundation outlined above, in which the relationship of a subject to photographic representation was opened up onto a field of intertextuality, Burgin's explication of these numerous associations provoked by photographic 'text' and subject is as follows:

The psychic process by which any single image can spark an explosions of associations - visual and verbal images - are those of the 'unconscious', what Freud called the 'primary processes'. The particular trajectories launched through the ever-shifting intertextual fields skip, stepping-stone fashion, and 'dissolve', along the traces of the spectator's fantasies/histories. A consequence of this theory, informed by psychoanalysis, has been to further add to the theoretical model of the spectator: the body not only labors, it also desires" (1984: 65).

In pulling away from and problematizing realist and romanticist based accounts, Burgin wants to lay stress upon the uncertainty of ideological processes involved in the

polysemic nature of photographic signs and viewing subjects. But there are many aspects of his method which directly contradict his stated aims towards the signifying 'productivity' of the photograph and viewing subject. In many respects, he elides the differences and possible contradictions between a 'subject' and the discursive positionings of photographic representation. He seems to want to imply that as 'constituted subjects' we are always already there for whatever 'hails' us. Thus, this space between - interpellation - is reduced to a mere minor faction. The dangers of such a reduction lie in its failure to account for the historical and material specificity of both 'subjects' and photographic representations; such factors which precisely account for the productivity of the conditionality and provisionality of interpellations and their meanings. Not only 'subjects', but discourses, images, and interpellations have histories, and it is this stress upon the dynamic and unstable properties of each which allows for contradiction or even agency.

With his seeming emphasis upon a strict correspondence between the meanings of a photograph and the interpellation of a 'subject', Burgin undermines the concept of 'productivity' within photographic texts and subjects. Still more, he has taken the abstract category of 'the subject' to an even greater pre-determination. The 'explosion of associations' is engendered by an 'unconscious

desire'. Productivity is reduced to Freudian primary processes.

Burgin's analysis of ideology demands a particular attention to 'constituted' subjectivity. And this attention is also dependent upon a particular concept of the subject which in turn is brought to bear upon his theorizations of ideological interpellation. As such, in using 'the subject' as his theoretical fulcrum, Burgin relies upon Lacanian theory to provide the specifications of not only his theoretical subject, but also ideology and visual representation. In this manner, the workings of ideology in photographic representation and the subject are brought under the same limits, or wrought from the same origin, for Burgin must occlude any disjunction between the two. Hence, Lacanian psychoanalysis allows Burgin to bracket off any disruptions to his own theorizations.

Psychoanalytic theory is necessary because ideology is not a matter of false consciousness, it is not a matter of consciousness at all, it is profoundly unconscious (Burgin, 1986: 196)

While ideology's reach into the unconscious has been importantly dealt with by Althusser and Lacan, and indeed the body not only 'labors but desires', ideology here becomes 'profoundly unconscious', which seems to imply that it finds its source there. How this analogous slide takes place, is, as Stuart Hall states in his critique of 'Screen theory', first through a series of homologies, "then a series of identities, [which] give these apparently distinct (if

related) levels a single and common source and foundation" (1980: 159).

As a critique of the unitary and integral 'subject' of Cartesian theory, Lacanian psychoanalysis re-worked Freud's thesis of 'unconscious processes' to include a notion of contradiction. In 'the subject's' entry into the 'symbolic' - at that point when it is brought into and constituted by the realm of language - it also experiences a number of 'unconscious processes' such as sublimation or repression. For instance, Freud posited a non-gendered, therefore possibly bi- or homosexual neonate, but at the point of entry into the symbolic, this sexuality may become repressed under the social guise of either a male or female gender. Thus, at their point of conjuncture, these 'unconscious processes' and relations of knowledge and language act to break open the unified individual into a series of contradictory positions. We may be heterosexual, but we may also experience (repressed) homosexual desires. Hence Morley's assertion that, for 'Screen theory', "contradiction already exists at the psychoanalytic level". Moreover, as Hall points out, Lacan's theory of the formation of the subject is especially appended to visual analogues (the 'mirror phrase', voyeurism, the 'gaze', etc.). As he puts it, "These have made it especially easy and tenable to forge a connection between the 'primary' psychoanalytic processes through which subjects-as-such are constituted and the related processes of representation and

identification in visual discourses and texts [including photography]" (1980: 158). In this way, most everything can be reinscribed onto the terrain of the subject; set to rest, finally, not only through a series of constructed homologies, but through a series of reductions.

'[I]deology' [is] now conceived of in terms of a space of representation, which the subject inhabits, a limitless space in which the desiring subject negotiates by means of predominantly unconscious transactions (Burgin, 1987b: 35).

In this way also there is the ellipsis of a 'subject-in-general' for a 'desiring subject' whose actions are largely based upon unconscious mechanisms. Both 'ideology' and 'the subject' have been subdued to fit an orderly theoretical structure. It is difficult then, given these reductions, to understand how Burgin can theorize ideology as 'a limitless space', particularly when movement within this space is restricted to the impulses of 'desire'.

The main problem stems from the way 'desire', as a 'primary process', is presented as an immutable given. For as such, it is also hermetically distinct from changing material conditions, and thus becomes a universal constant: transhistorical and transcultural. Clearly, such an emphasis directly contradicts Burgin's intentions of proposing the relations between photographic representation and subjectivity as always mutable and inconstant; given over to the ever changing, historically specific relations between its apparatuses, objects and subjects. For if



photography is wrought from a desire "for protection against the loss of the object", this 'desire' then is defined in terms of repression and lack, which relate back to 'primary unconscious processes'. Therefore, it is presented as a universal constant in all human beings at all places in all moments in time. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reach for other factors in explanation. 'Desire' becomes the 'last instance' or the final determinate in the ideological/semiotic production of photography.

The 'desire of the subject' then, is an anchor of stability and repetition in an otherwise dynamic process of production. As mentioned previously, the placing of this point of condensation implies the same postulate as 'Screen theory', from which it takes its cue and in which the productivity of the text is similarly reduced. 'Screen theory' focused predominantly upon the 'classic realist text', particularly as it pertained to film, which was examined for its capacity to present its discourses as natural, 'real' or credible. It was interested in the way a film spectator is given over to identifying with the controlling look of the camera, and thereby constructed as the 'subject' of the film/text. And yet while 'Screen theory' was concerned with deconstructing the dominant subject-positions of the classic realist text, its attempts at this endeavor were in many ways short-circuited by its insistence upon constructing, again, a series of homologues, and thus identifications, between text and subject.

Identification was constrained within a Lacanian psychoanalytic explanation whereby the spectator's engagement with the film/text became nothing but a replay of the original primary unconscious processes of subject formation. Moreover, the relationship of viewing subjects was also seen as analogous to the 'secondary processes' of 'dreamwork' as outlined by Metz in his important article, "The Imaginary Signifier" (1975).<sup>(2)</sup> If contradiction or disturbance was found at all in viewing, it only always extended from these primary unconscious processes. Disruption in the text (its productivity) arose not from the convoluted history and specificity of a subject, nor, as Hall has asserted, from;

the ideological effectivity of the representations produced, nor the ideological problematics within which a discourse is operating, nor the social, political or historical practices with which it is articulated. Its 'productivity' is defined exclusively in terms of the capacity of the text to set the viewer 'in place' in a position of unproblematic identification/knowledge. And that, in turn, is founded on the process of the formation of the subject (Hall, 1980: 159).

Burgin goes further in explicating this foundation as based upon 'the desire for the lost object'. "The lost object is something which will repair the rent which has opened between the subject and the maternal body (the breast is the prototype of all lost objects)" (Burgin, 1986: 98). Thus, classical film narratives (and photographic texts, under Burgin's extension), perpetually restage this (oedipal) drama; a story which evolves from the separation

from the mother's breast to eventual identification with textual (patriarchal) authority. While such an argument is unattractive in its reductivity, what renders it even more difficult is its construction of the female body as the source of this moment of loss. "Lacan observes that from the moment we are expelled from the womb ... our lives are a succession of experiences of loss " (Burgin, 1986: 43). All finds its source from the maternal body, from whom we are expelled. Thus we forever feel the tug of this desire for the lost object and henceforth are compelled to endlessly comply with the demands of ideological representation. The female body is appropriated for the purposes of a photographic 'theory' which then objectifies and abstracts it into a signifier of desire.

What is most vexing about this trans-historical and evolutionary narrative is that identification is always necessarily posited from a masculine point of view, for identification is made, inevitably, with a dominant, patriarchal ideology. In Burgin and 'Screen theory's' account of the subject's constitution by and for visual representation, the spectator is seen as possessing a look which is already given, and this look is male. In Burgin's writing, this becomes explicit.

When I look at a woman I am a screen upon which she projects her own image, and I am myself a picture ... The so-called 'phallogentric look' toward the woman, which is assumed to assert 'I am a man', also continually slips into 'am I a man?' - in the sense of 'what is a man?'. That look contains the question of masculine identity as

it perpetually seeks to construct itself in relation to otherness. A most significant aspect of that otherness is the procreative capacity of the female body, and in much of my work I've tried to bring out that aspect of the supposedly 'controlling' male gaze (1989: 8).

In invoking the 'phallogentric gaze', Burgin implicitly calls upon Laura Mulvey's oft-cited article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), which was an important feminist contribution to the psychoanalytic figuration of 'Screen theory'. In articulating the ways in which the dominant codes of mainstream cinema always place the image of the woman as the object of the male gaze, Mulvey proposes a radical "scorched earth policy" for feminist film-making which is aimed at the destruction of patriarchal narrative and visual pleasure. However, Burgin's refusal of the patriarchal system of the look only turns back upon an affirmation of the pleasures of the (male) spectator in the field of masculine vision. With his photographs this often becomes painfully clear, as in works such as Zoo 78 (1978-79), or the re-enactment of Manet's Olympia (1982), which ostensibly inquires into the 'mastering' and sexually-based pleasure of looking while photographically reproducing this pleasure. Burgin's defense of this work in the face of feminist complaints, (besides charging his critics with censorship, (1989: 8)), is based upon the need to 'unpack' the desire and the pleasure involved in looking at images of women:

In all of my work, then, the viewer, whether a woman or a man, is put in a heterosexual male position - which is not at all the same as a

masculine position. I'm not standing back and pointing at this position. I'm trying to represent the subjective typography of that position by describing the space of that relation to the woman-as-other from within. I'm trying to give a feel of that shifting space of representations (1987a: 65).

Most women needn't be reminded of the "subjective typology" which Burgin feels compelled to (yet again) represent. While Burgin may wish to break down the supposed control of the male gaze, he himself engages with its powers of objectification by consistently placing the theoretical question of (male) identity onto the maternal female body. In much the same way the desiring woman in Pliny's tale becomes rendered object: represented only in terms of her construction within this theoretical frame of reference; elaborated only to account for the psychosocial development of the male. She is a screen upon which Burgin has projected his own theoretical motives. Despite her presence in Pliny's story of desire, this woman, as a subject of desire or signification, is unrepresentable. And she becomes doubly an ahistorical and purely textual figure. For if the constitution of a (male) subject is reduced down to primary processes and universal bodily drives, the female subject becomes a universal metaphor of ("procreative") body parts. And if the 'subject' is already written into the text, the female subject is twice inscribed: once by her inclusion into this 'subject', and twice by the way she has been taken up as an essential object for the formation of this 'subject'.

I don't mean to imply that women cannot be 'desiring subjects'. But in Burgin's formulation there is no room to posit or even question how or why this desire may be engendered differently. Because he can only speak of his (masculine) desires.

Peter Gidal - the filmmaker - said that in response to feminism he stopped making images of women. My own response to feminism in the 70's was to start making images of women. It seemed to me that a major problem in theory and practice at that time was that while female sexuality was endlessly problematized, male sexuality was taken for granted as something simple and self-evident. ... my work aimed to represent male sexuality as every bit as uncertain and problematical as female sexuality: no essential masculinity - only masculinities (Burgin, 1989: 8).

What is most contradictory here, spurious even, is that Burgin does represent not only an essential masculinity, but an essential subjectivity. His reliance upon 'Screen' and psychoanalytic theory will not allow him to do otherwise. Yet in speaking of 'masculinities' in the plural, it would appear that Burgin would like to account for a much freer play of identities in (male) subjectivity. More generally, he would like to posit the relations between a subject and photographic text as ambiguous and irresolute. But given the theoretical ground he has laid out for himself - one which occludes the distinction between subject-position and subject-in-general; which reduces contradiction to an original, a priori, moment in the unconscious; and which, in the end, boils everything down to 'desire' - Burgin can do no more than adhere to the notion of subjectivity as a textual practice. Subjectivity is 'already written',

'simple and self-evident'.

Still more, female subjectivity has little place in this tale. If we are to explain subjectivity as a positively, rather than differentially, defined identity, then female subjects, even more so than Burgin's (male) subjects, are precluded an achieved subjectivity. For women within his construct are defined only as "m-other" (1989: 5) in relation to a male subjectivity. Female subjects can only be explained as objects of desire; hence their subjectivity is only derived within the strict bounds of the symbolic order of patriarchy. There is little to account for what a female spectator identifies with when she looks at a photograph, other than to see herself as she is seen; by a male subject, within a theoretical construct which can only explain the masculine.

Most importantly, and following on the heels of this absence, there is no room to consider how a woman's subjectivity might be formed outside of the 'primary' identifications of patriarchy. Firstly, while culturally forged, not all women's identities obsequiously comply with those roles which a heterosexual patriarchy offers them.<sup>(3)</sup> Secondly, as women change through aging, society also changes its discursive positioning of them. And this 'aging' of positions does not solely entail those master referents of the "procreative capacity of the female body". How, for instance, would a post-menopausal woman be

delegated under Burgin's theorizations? Having ended her "procreative capacity" and her duties as mother and often, wife, such a woman now experiences life in a way previously unrealized very differently represented by patriarchal society.

Throughout all this, it has been difficult to retain the idea that Burgin's theoretical motives have been precisely to free the subject from the demands of formalist or rationalist theories of representation: to pull away from a desire for certitude. Burgin wants to include the unaccountable, indescribable forces of subjectivity within the production of photographic signification. But given his definition of subjectivity as textually constructed, his theorizing directly and internally contradicts such ends. Such an explanation, a priori, renders his stated aims null and void. And in attempting to explain the mediating function of the unconscious, Burgin's emphasis comes to rest too heavily upon this end; inevitably evoking not only a textual determinism, but a psychical one.

Psychoanalysis reveals unconscious wishes - and the fantasies they engender - to be as immutable a force in our lives as any material circumstance. They do not however, belong to material reality... the space where they take place - between 'perception and consciousness' - is not a material space (Burgin, 1987b: 38).

Since our unconscious wishes contribute to the construction of 'reality' in representation, but these wishes cannot be guessed at within the realm of the material, where then do we go? How do we account for the



ideological apparatus of photography in all its complexity - its modes of production, its relations to particular societies at particular conjunctures of time and place, and importantly, to the specific histories of a particular subject - without referring to a 'material space'?

Beyond a certain limit, attention to the 'specificity' of a representational practice - grounded most usually in its material substrate and material mode of production - becomes unhelpful (Burgin, 1986: 139).

The limits which Burgin has set here, circumvented by psychoanalytic theory, attest to an aversion on his part to consider the relationship between 'subjects' and photographic texts as anything but an abstract one. Despite his assertion that "psychoanalytic theory does not construct a realm of the subjective apart from social life - it is a theory of the internalisation of the social as subjective - and, as such, has profound implications for any theory of ideology" (1986: 113), the material productivity of the social is treated as mere shadow; epiphenomenal at best. Ideology is still "profoundly unconscious".

Burgin has also written a particular story of invention in order to speak assuredly of meanings and motives. And it is one in which details of historical, social and subjective conditions have been erased to a faint trace; rendered as minor characters in a tale based upon certain claims of originality. In this respect, Burgin's interpretation is unexceptional from those catholic and formalist explanations which have passed before.

Still, we certainly cannot transcend the ground which others have previously built. But we can become aware of the degree to which anterior desires for epistemological and textual authority also inform our own. There is an impasse here then, which lies between an inheritance of wishful thinking and a necessary negation of certitude. And while no suggestion of evasion from this impasse can be offered, certain indications can be made: that, in representing the present, something comes to be repeated, and that we must always rethink and question our inherited desires.

The following chapter examines those photographic critics and theorists who concentrate upon the particular discursive powers of the photographic apparatus and see its practical nature as dependent upon the agents and institutions which define it, invest it, and mobilize it in the service of the social order. Unlike Burgin's theorizations, this criticism pays close attention to the changing determinations of history. And yet in doing so, it too, like Burgin, often exempts the struggle between 'subjects' and discourses, and thus limits the capabilities of the 'subject' in the production of meaning. While inquiring into how a discursive analysis of photography locates its object within material relations, the following chapter will also examine how it sets definite parameters for considerations of the processes of the 'subject' and subjectivity within photographic representation.

## Footnotes

1. Geoff Miles, Mark Lewis, Mitra Tabrizian, Olivier Richon, and Karen Knorr all studied together at the Polytechnic of Central London in the 1970's. In her catalogue essay introducing their group show, Magnificent Obsession, (interestingly named after the Douglas Sirk melodrama), Laura Mulvey describes the five's education as taking place during "the period when a conjuncture between feminist politics, psychoanalytic theory and deconstructive aesthetics produced radical avant-garde across the visual arts" (1985:1). As students of Burgin, these five photographers have taken up and followed much of his theoretical and aesthetic agenda. It is this respect that they have been collectively described as the "Burgin School", for they appear to encompass consensus on both stylistic and theoretical bases. Mark Lewis in particular has taken up Burgin's interest in 'masculinity', with many of the same, difficult, results (eg: Burning, 1988). The group itself is composed of diverse nationalities: Lewis and Miles are Canadian, Knorr is American, Richon is Swiss, and Tabrizian is Iranian.

2. Stuart Hall describes Metz's essay, "The Imaginary Signifier" (1975) as a "locus classicus of the move from a [structuralist] semiotics to a Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, and its republication in Screen marked the passage of the journal from the earlier debates on 'realism' to a full-blown Lacanian position" (1980:158). This republication of Metz's article immediately preceded the issue of Screen introducing Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema".

3. The incapacity of psychoanalytically-informed photographic criticism to consider homosexuality can be quite pronounced. Of note in this respect is the New Museum's Difference: On Representation and Sexuality (1985), which, while noteworthy for bringing the politics of sexed representation into the gallery, left issues of homosexual representation and/or spectatorship as a glaring absence. As Jan Zita Grover writes, "to date, sexual difference has ventured no further off the curatorial track than male and female heterosexuality" (1989:191).

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## Chapter Six

### Heirs to Foucault: Critical Histories of Photography

As noted in the previous chapter, psychoanalytic theory offers an important method to photographic criticism by which to trace configurations of subjectivity across the various purchases of photographic representation. In particular, it has allowed photographic criticism the means by which to indicate sexually biased vision and to foreground the sexual politics of photographic representation. By focusing upon the construction of sexual difference within the domain of the photographic, criticism informed by psychoanalytic theory has furthered the expedition against essentialist histories of (sexed) subjects and photographs.

However, while disarming some of the more entrenched veracities of photography and subjectivity, this articulation produces some essentialist histories of its own. Most notably, it has turned from a complex assessment of those multiple differences which form the tissues of subjectivity, to a rather narrow focus upon the acquisition of (hetero)sexual difference. The consequence of this limitation - in which heterosexual difference becomes the fulcrum by which a subject's relation to photographic representation is balanced - has been to bracket off and dismiss other important attributing factors. Thus, the

specific historical and material elements of a subject's relation to photographic imagery are exempted in a photographic criticism which, locked within the logic of a psychoanalytic framework, sees this relation as the result of invarient and trans-historical psychical processes. Moreover, this exclusion encloses the criticism which enacts it: for the conjuncture of a Lacanian-influenced psychoanalytic theory with photographic criticism has produced its own insulated clique of critics and photographers.

Given the orthodoxy which psychoanalytic theory has been awarded within certain purveys of photographic criticism, it becomes all the more important, and difficult, to address the politics which lie within the interstices of this articulation. Most conspicuously, the reduction of multiple differences (in both photography and subjectivity) to ahistorical markers of a white, male heterosexual difference, has peremptory consequences. In effect, such psychoanalytic accounts block consideration of those agencies, histories, experiences and photographs which do not fit into its formulaic schemata. And in this respect, the confinement of the relations of subjectivity and photography to heterosexual difference speaks more of what is excluded than not: what is confined lays precisely outside of this criticism's institutional and methodological limits. Moreover, psychoanalytically-informed photographic

criticism relinquishes an acknowledgement of these methodological limits themselves. What is conveniently forgotten is that the explanations of photographic critics are equally bound to institutional and epistemological situations, and, in this case, equally beholden to a desire for authority, certitude, and origin.

As a critical counter-point, I would like to turn to a form of criticism which raises the problem of photography in a more heterogeneous and historical way. Rather than positing analogies, homologues or uniformities, this photographic criticism looks to the specific and changing strategic positions at which certain powers pass through or take hold of photographs and (photographed) subjects. The relations in which photography is found and finds its objects is thus not solely localized in 'psychical processes', nor a mechanical apparatus, nor in phenomenological experience, but is instead dispersed, 'microphysically', across a range of institutions, agents and discursive apparatuses. For this mode of analysis, the power invested in photography has no essence; it is simply operational. It cannot be traced to an attribute, but a relation. However, this relation as John Tagg insists, is not to be viewed as "an inexorable chain of echoing repercussion" (1988: 25), but rather an inconsistent, if effective, arrangement of different knowledges, discourses and powers. The key to looking at these fluctuating orchestrations of photography is found in the historical



shifts of power and sense. As Tagg writes:

The photograph is not a magical 'emanation' but a material product of a material apparatus set to work in specific contexts, by specific forces, for more or less defined forces. It requires therefore, not an alchemy, but a history ... (1988a: 3).

This criticism investigates the anatomy of discourses which historically frame photographs. Its object of inquiry could summarily be defined as the 'photographic archive'; that is to say, the accumulation of photographic discourses which at any given moment act as evidence for a 'photographic truth'. It also enacts a necessarily historical form of analysis, for in examining how photographic practices and discourses cohere and disband, this form of criticism departs - not from a moment of inception - but from the contingent sites of concrete historical conditions.

It becomes clear that these are Michel Foucault's ideas repeated here. And it is from Foucault's studies into the field constituted by discourse and epistemology that this photographic criticism takes its general direction. Following Foucault's methodology in The Order of Things (1970), and The Archeology of Knowledge (1972), this photographic criticism looks to the specific and changing conditions that make possible the appearance, the functioning and the instrumentality of certain photographic knowledges and truths. And attending to Foucault's writings in Discipline and Punish (1977), these photographic critics

have focused upon photography's capacity to 'allocate', 'classify', and compose bodies: criminal bodies, deviant bodies, bodies of poverty and anatomic-physiological bodies. Paying particular attention to those photographic practices of observation and surveillance which were increasingly demanded by local exigencies and conditions during the 19th c., these critics trace the development of a technology of power, which, in its 'capillary' movements, reaches into the very lives of individuals.

Thus, a partial list of these critical essays on photography denotes these concerns: beginning with John Tagg's two-part essay on "Power and Photography" (1980;1981); Rosalind Krauss's "Photography's Discursive Spaces" (1982); Alan Sekula's "The Body and the Archive" (1986); and more recently, Richard Bolton's edited anthology of 'critical histories' of photography (1989), or Geoffrey Batchen's archeological inquiry into the epistemological shifts which acted as the conditions of possibility for the development of the medium (1990).

These authors represent only a small fraction of critics who utilize the methodology of discourse analysis to critically unpack photographic histories and truths. Moreover, the utilization of this method has not been solely applied to the investigation of past archives, but more recent ones, such as Carol S. Vance's essay on the Meese Commission's use of photographs as 'evidential proof' of the injurious effects of pornography (1990: 38-50). However, out

of this range of critics and critical histories, John Tagg is perhaps the most well-known analyst of institutionalized society and photography. Following Foucault's distinction of a history of writing from a history of literature, Tagg's work could be described as a history of photographic practices, rather than a history of photography. In mapping the historical emergence of different photographic archives, Tagg at times has looked to the discursive strengths of aesthetic and documentary photography. But more often, he has leveled his attention on the colonizing and repressive, rather than honorific, uses of the photographic apparatus. For Tagg, photographic practices are always "saturated in relations of power", and the practices he has predominantly charted are those which stand as evidence or mark a truth for the powers of policing and discipline. Thus Tagg writes, in a style reminiscent of Foucault:

A vast and repetitive archive of images is accumulated in which the smallest deviations may be noted, classified, and filed. The format varies hardly at all. There are bodies and spaces. The bodies - workers, vagrants, criminals, patients, the insane, the poor, the colonized races - are taken one by one: isolated in a shallow, contained space; turned full face and subjected to an unreturnable gaze; illuminated, focused, measured, numbered and named ... Each device is the trace of a wordless power, replicated in countless images, whenever the photographer prepares an exposure, in police cell, prison, mission house, hospital, asylum or school. The spaces too ... are confronted with the same frontality and measured against an ideal space; ... a space of unobstructed lines of sight, open to vision and supervision; a desirable space in which bodies will be changed into ... docile and disciplined subjects; a space, in Foucault's sense, of a new strategy of power-knowledge (1984: 12).

In examining the uses of a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis for photographic criticism, this chapter addresses the potential merit of a form of inquiry which excavates the uncertain and problematic 'truths' of photography. The benefits of this criticism lie in the way in which it begins from an unstable basis in which nothing about photography can be presumed beforehand: "the so-called medium has no existence outside its historical specifications" (Tagg, 1988a: 118). In this respect, it differs from so many other forms of photographic theory or criticism, which, despite contrary intentions, still attempt to posit certain, and often ahistorical, 'truths' or evidences for photography. It is in fact the nagging insistence of a motile and turbulent history which tempers and defeats these attempts.

Yet, this concentration upon the historical instrumentality of photography also may carry its own determinations. One example of this restriction may be evinced in a particular complaint leveled by Alan Sekula in his article "The Body and the Archive" (1986). Sekula's essay shares with Tagg an interest and emphasis upon photography's powers of isolation, individuation and surveillance. Describing the invention of the taxonomic and photographic ordering of criminal bodies in the 19th C., Sekula also importantly states that "the central artifact of this system is not the camera, but the filing cabinet" (Sekula, 1986: 16). And in this respect, his project diverts

from Tagg's on one crucial point; which primarily concerns the appropriation of Foucault's metaphor of the panopticon, but extends onto a larger debate about the disciplinary powers awarded to photography. Foucault invokes the panopticon (Jeremy Bentham's notorious system of incarceration) as an exemplary apparatus of modern society, whose circular economy of surveillance renders all caught within it as the bearers, - both subject and object, effect and articulation - of disciplinary power. And in this respect, photography is posited as an apparatus entailing similiar micro-powers. Yet, as demonstrated in Tagg's statement cited above, the correllation between the optical powers of the camera and Foucault's description of Bentham's panoptic architecture in Discipline and Punish is often too seamlessly woven. This also becomes more clearly displayed in Tagg's article "Power and Photography: Part 1, A Means of Surveillance: The Photograph as Evidence in Law" (1980), wherein he recites a Foucauldian account of the panoptic powers of early police and psychiatric photography in Britain. Sekula's complaint lies with Tagg's claim that, "with the development of photography, [Bentham's] utopian structure was to become redundant" (Tagg, 1980: 45):

Foucault took [Bentham's panopticon] as a metaphor for that continuing process of proliferating local tactics and techniques which operated in society on a micro level, seeking to procure the maximum effect from the minimum effort and manufacturing docile and utilisable bodies. Yet by the end of the nineteenth century, the need for this cumbersome architecture was gone. The new will to power, founded on a fateful three-fold

unity of knowledge, control and utility, could find a new metaphor in the unobtrusive cells of the photographic frame (ibid.).

Contradictorily, this assertion effectively breaks with Foucault's geneological method, whose concern was not "to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity ... but to bring to light the epistemological field" (1970: xxiii). Secondly, it denies the specificities (of excesses and limitations) of the powers invested in photographic practices and upon those who were both subject and object of these powers. Thirdly, as Sekula explains:

This seems to accord too much power to photography, and to imply that domination operates entirely by the force of visual representation. To suggest that cameras replaced prisons is a more than a little hyperbolic ... Once discourse turns on metaphor, it becomes a simple matter to substitute a photographic metaphor for an architectural one (1986: 9).

While I do not agree with Sekula that Tagg means to so blatantly propose that cameras replaced prisons, (which of course are still in effect, and much more effectively repressive than the camera has or will ever be), I do find that Tagg's concern with the 'burden' of truth which weighs upon the photograph has also tended to overly burden photography with exaggerated claims to power.

What is of primary concern here are the disjunctures of a form of analytic inquiry, which, while built upon the basis of Foucault's writings on power and knowledge, in many key respects deviates from it. This differentiation is primarily illustrated in the ways in which these critical writings effect what is at root an ideological analysis. In

advocating that every practice is a combinatoire of relations between different factors, (of discourses, powers, knowledges, strengths, weaknesses, visibility and blindness), Foucault asserts the indeterminacy of the linkage between a photographic practice and its politics. Importantly, this indeterminacy demands that one turn away from thinking in terms of an absolute power (determined by state or ideological interests), to the local character of this contingent unity. Yet, there is still a tendency to read photographic practices as an aggregate doubly inscribed within signification and representation: in other words, within the realm of the ideological. And once within this realm, all photographic practices can be read along ascending lines: first as they lie (intertextually) within networks of meaning (signification), and secondly, to how the meanings of these photographic practices specifically adhere to a social institution and/or subject position (representation). While Foucault also advanced an ascending, rather than descending, analysis of power (1980: 99), there is still a tendency in this photographic criticism to deduce a power standing at the centre of these relations.

Thus, in emphasizing photography's powers of documentation as the function of a new kind of knowledge about subjects, this critical approach often asserts a predictable quality to the effectivity of the

power/knowledge couplet. In effect, photographic practices are read in terms of one governing principle of social or economic organization (i.e.: the mode of production). Leaning heavily upon Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatuses" essay (1971), this form of photographic criticism tends to view photographic practices as they reproduce the relations of production necessary for the existence of the state. And in so doing, it also acts to reinstate much of the functionalism of Althusser's essay: wherein photographic practices are seen only as they have the function of reproducing a dominant ideology. What is perhaps most ironic in this move is that Foucault deliberately withheld from using the term 'ideology', preferring instead to talk about a discursive regime which does not necessarily entail an ideological dimension. "It is both much more and much less than ideology" (Foucault, 1980: 102).

The attempt to posit a functional necessity or connection between a photographic practice and a structural state or ideological power is quite explicit in Tagg's early writings. One instance where such contradictory moves become clear is in Tagg's 1978 essay, "The Currancy of the Photograph", wherein he attempts to wed an Althusserian model of state apparatuses with a Foucauldian discourse analysis. Centered upon the photographs made under the Works Progress Administration in the 30's, this essay explicates how notions of realism, 'truth' and certain



ideological structures are embedded within 'New Deal' imagery. Using semiotic analysis and an Althusserian account of 'Ideological State Apparatuses', Tagg's intent is to open the ideological field of these photographs:

The photograph seems to declare: 'This really happened. The camera was there. See for yourself.' However, if this binding quality of the photograph is partly reinforced at the level of internal relations by the degree of definition, it is also produced and reproduced by certain privileged ideological apparatuses..." (1978: 50).

For Tagg, "[p]hotography is a mode of production" (ibid.: 54) like any other under a capitalist society, which includes as well the exploitation of resources and "the submissiveness of its labor force" (ibid.). And in this respect, it is also "an apparatus of ideological control under the central 'harmonizing' authority of the ideology of the class which, openly or through alliance, holds state power and weilds the state apparatus" (ibid.). Clearly then, structural lines of connection are placed between photographic practices and the ruling class. But lest this connection be seen as too determinate, Tagg then introduces Foucault's methodology of discourse analysis to assert the historical specificity of this correspondence:

What I am trying to stress here is the absolute continuity of the photograph's ideological existence with their existence as material objects whose 'currancy' and 'value' arise in certain distinct and historically specific social practices and are ultimately a function of the state (ibid.: 54).

As Tagg now retrospectively admits (1988a/1988b), this attempt to reconcile what are often contestory theoretical

approaches, poses its own political difficulties. Quite simply, cross-breeding an Althusserian model with semiotics in order to locate the institutional nature of signifying practices, and then adding a dash of historical specificity through discourse analysis makes for a strange brew. Most clearly, the problem lies with the discord of Althusserian and Foucauldian accounts. The reductivity of an Althusserian idea of power as constituted through social reproduction, and which is then expedited through the cultural apparatus of photography, runs counter to Foucault's thesis of the micro-physics of power. As Tagg is to later state, the Althusserian proposal:

"still maintained an idea that cultural 'apparatuses' reflected or represented power relations that were really and properly set in place elsewhere, in production. ... This became a problem because the idea that institutions reflected power that came from elsewhere ran against the very grain of the theory of discourse and power being invoked (1988b: 9).

This attempt to overlay a cohesive model of state power with a discursive history is not only undertaken by Tagg. In its efforts to explore the development of new forms of social control and practices of visual representation, this form of photographic criticism began from a notion of social totality, particularly in terms of an Althusserian model, because it allowed for a more visible, (ie: causal), relationship to be discerned. Additionally, it must be understood that as these writers primarily came from a Marxist tradition, the architectural model of society as an

aggregate of interlocking floors and levels was difficult to discard.

In 1984, Roberta McGrath, who was then a student of Tagg's, published "Medical Police", an essay on the discursive positions and positionings of medical photography. Mapping the ways in which a newly emergent medical profession and technology of photography in the 19th c. contributed to the construction and mediation of discourses of normality and society, McGrath's essay focuses on how "changes in the mode and relation of production" (1984: 14), allowed for the extended control of the state. As her analysis centers upon the strategies developed by the state to 'protect' the labor value of the working body and to control its potential threat to the ruling classes, her approach is necessarily Althusserian in its emphasis. Yet, in charting the historical shifts of discourse and technology, and its material effects upon human bodies, it also employs a Foucauldian form of analysis. As with Tagg's essay mentioned above, this attempt to supplement a theory which is leveled upon the structures of class and economics with a detailed historical description of capillary powers has its own contradictory effects. In McGrath's essay, these consequences are cast in a tendency to claim too much power for photography; in effect, to deny the contingency of its practices. This leads McGrath to make reductive claims for the apparatus, such as: "Earlier. one had knelt before God or king; in the 19th century, one stood before the

camera" (ibid.: 18), or to engender the technology in feminine terms:

In addition, photography was constructed as 'a servant', 'handmaiden to science', 'youngest of the sisterhood of the arts, adept in the high office of investigation and in the subservient office of the simple record', 'a species of upper servant'. This construction of photography as female and as servant was important. It connoted the idea that the image placed itself within the camera which had only to open to receive it, thus completing the identification of photography as female. Such a construction also served to mask that photography was a mechanism of power.

Passivity was also a correlative of objectivity (ibid.: 17).

McGrath's sexed construction of photography as female and as passive directly contradicts the conditionality and multiplicity of relations which are at work in photographic practices. In collapsing the practice of photography back onto singular metaphors of gender, or class, McGrath claims a homogenous identity for photography. Furthermore, she supplements this reflectionist and reductionist assertion with a psychoanalytic account of the libidinal investment involved in looking at photographs (ibid.: 17). Surely, she has now strayed far from Foucault's archeological base. Equally, this psychoanalytic adjunct only serves to remove McGrath's analysis even further from the complex processes of historical and institutional relations.

Interestingly, Alan Sekula's "The Body and the Archive" (1986), also demonstrates this proclivity for totality. In his thoughtful and complex mapping of the uses of photographic portraiture for the "ceremonial presentation of

the bourgeois self" (1986: 6), and the physionomic ordering of the criminal 'other', Sekula is confronted with "a double system: a system of representation capable of functioning both honorifically and repressively" (ibid.). Charting the connections between these two poles, Sekula finds that the "possessive individualism", the marking of a private self, in every portrait photograph "has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the files of the police" (ibid: 7).

We can speak then of a generalized, inclusive archive, a shadow archive that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain. ... The general, all-inclusive archive necessarily contains both the traces of the visible bodies of heroes, leaders, moral exemplars, celebrities, and those of the poor, the diseased, the insane, the criminal, the nonwhite, the female, and all other embodiments of the unworthy. The clearest indication of the essential unity of this archive of images of the body lies in the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century a single hermeneutic paradigm had gained widespread prestige. This paradigm had two tightly intertwined branches, physiognomy and phrenology. Both shared the belief that the surface of the body, and especially the face and head, bore the outward signs of inner character (ibid.: 11).

Sekula's project is to trace the geneology of how "photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the 'other', to define both the 'generalized look' - the typology - and the 'contingent instance' of deviance and social pathology" (ibid.: 7). In so doing, Sekula's description of the use of photography as a unified system of visualization and interpretation turns upon the photograph's dual capacity: to act as a singular representation, and also to be representative of, a general category or type. Having foregrounded these two models of photographic

realism, Sekula then looks to how they both reflect, and were put to use by, the two different, but interrelated contributions of Francis Galton and Alphonse Bertillon. With Bertillon as "mechanic and clerk", and Galton as essentialist and eugenicist, a photographic archive was developed in which the criminal body could be viewed as both emblematic of a social aggregate and individuated for the purposes of inspection.

Early in the article, Sekula writes that "physiognomy and phrenology contributed to the ideological hegemony of a capitalism that increasingly relied upon a hierarchical division of labor ... and offered an essential hermeneutic service to a world of fleeting and often anonymous market transactions" (ibid.: 12). At the end of the essay, he returns to this point to place the resurrection of a physiognomic photographic practice as indicative of our present political times:

Galton lives in the renewed authority of biological determinism founded in the increased hegemony of the political Right in the western democracies. That is, Galton lives quite specifically in the neo-Spencerian pronouncements of Reaganism, Thatcherism, and the National Front ... [And] the contemporary art scene is rife with a variety of what can be termed 'neophysiognomic' concerns. The body has returned with a vengeance. The heavily expressionistic character of this return makes the scientific and racialistic underpinnings rather remote. In photography however, this lineage is harder to repress (ibid.: 62)

While Sekula's pronouncement may correctly point to a particular aspect of the current political and cultural demeanor, it over-privileges the ideological determinations

at work in this photographic practice. Certainly there are elements of truth in his argument, but it ignores the complex contingent and overdetermined articulations of both photography and the hegemony of the New Right. His argument rests upon a notion of representation which leads directly back to the ideological; claiming, in effect, that the cultural phenomenon of a renewed corporeal typology in photographic practice is indicative (representative) of a particular political hegemony. Yet, this phenomenon spins out onto a much wider and diverse apparatus, which encompasses factors which do not necessarily 'represent' an 'ideology'. While there are many determinations in this apparatus, there is no singular determinant.

This argument denies both the historical specificity of a photographic practice and shifts in the different knowledges and hierarchical powers that exist today. The interests which a discursive formation serve may be quite removed from those practices which appear to represent it. A photographic practice which represents a bio-social taxonomy can be articulated to very many, contradictory interests, from radical feminism to a 'New Traditionalism'. These manifold linkages each have their own histories, their own local forms and institutions, and their own 'capillary' trajectories, and thus their designations do not all meet at the same point.

The advantages of Foucault's theorizations of power,

knowledge and discourse for photographic criticism lie in their refusals of an imperitive power. Describing power as a "multiplicity of force relations", Foucault also noted that:

there are no relations of power without resistances; the latter being all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real (1980: 142).

Tagg has also written of "the forms and relations of power which are brought to bear on practices of representation ... but also the power effects which representational effects themselves engender - the interlacing of these fields, but also their interference patterns ..." (1988a: 21). Yet, in specifying the institutional uses of photography, and its role in the constitution and government of subjects, Tagg's writings have at times fallen towards asserting a secured photographic subjection.

In "Power and Photography: Part 1" (1980), Tagg describes the photographs taken by Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond, resident superintendent of the Female Department of the Surrey County Lunatic Asylum in the mid-1800's. Used to delineate insanity, Dr. Diamonds photographs acted as documentary record for future medical reference and for physiognomic analysis. Finding these photographs to rest at a historical ligature " where discourses of psychiatry, physiognomy, photographic science and aesthetics coincided



and overlapped" (1980: 42), Tagg places this connection within "a space in the new institutional order" where "the knowledge and truth of which photography became the guardian were inseparable from the power and control which it engendered" (ibid.).

Here, in the tentative photographic practice of Dr. Diamond ... is the nexus Foucault describes: the very coincidence of an ever more intimate observation and an ever more subtle control; an ever more refined institutional order and an ever more encompassing discourse; an ever more passive subjection and an ever more dominant benevolent gaze (ibid.: 42-43).

In his numerous investigations into the arrangements of discourses, knowledges and photographic practices which developed during the 19th C., Tagg begins to find a recurring effect: "the body isolated ... the subjection to an unreturnable gaze" (ibid.: 45). The exercise of power which the photograph produces is never contested; never returned at its point of relations. Tagg only offers a passive subjection to those filaments of power which extend within and beyond the camera.

As with so many photographic critics who work within this historical purview, Foucault's description of the panopticon is often used to advance claims for the new powers and knowledges awarded and effected by photography. McGrath, for instance, purloins this metaphor to posit the camera as "an eye which could penetrate the body" (ibid.: 18). It is from this oft-cited account that one limitation of this form of photographic criticism appears most consistently. Turning upon Foucault's metaphor, not

only has the camera been given powers analogous to the panopticon, but its subjects are equally presumed to entail the same degree of submissiveness to a photographic apparatus as to Bentham's architectural one.

As a countermove to these constructions of a docile photographic subject, I would like to consider an essay by Dick Hebdige which offers a number of uncertain resistances premised precisely upon the camera's operations of surveillance. Like Tagg, Hebdige also describes the historical moment at which a documentary photographic practice became inscribed by relations of power: its use for the systematic monitoring of deviant bodies; its means as an instrument of classification and control. And like Tagg, Hebdige also invokes Foucault, yet not the Discipline and Punish (1977) so dear to photographic critics, but the essay "The Subject and Power" (1982). It is here that Foucault speaks of the capacity of subjects to reposition themselves in the face of power. This is Hebdige's concern also. Of the possible refusals to the camera's objectification, he writes of the means by which punk and post-punk girls "interrupt the image-flow" and how, playing back and parodying the feminine position which falls upon them, they "turn being looked at into an aggressive act" (1988: 28-29). Similarly, he writes of how the body, as the subjectified object of a surveillant apparatus, returns this look with its own curse; of how the tattooed bodies of

skinheads embody "the swear word made flesh" (ibid.: 31).

... the subcultural milieu has been constructed underneath the authorized discourses, in the face of the multiple disciplines of the family, the school and the work place. Subculture forms in the space between surveillance and the evasion of surveillance, it translates the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasure of being watched. It is a hiding in the light (Hebdige, 1988: 35).

It must be emphasized that Hebdige's descriptions of negotiation or resistance in the face of a photographic subjection are specific instances, built upon the important basis of institutional critique. He does not, in other words, offer a generalized model of 'resistance' which can be read across historical, cultural, or social lines. This is the merit of his analysis, and it is one which could be equally applied by Tagg. Yet, despite the historical and institutional foundation of Tagg's method, his writings neglect the problematic of the subject.

Mid-way through "Power and Photography: Part 1" (1980), Tagg interrupts his descriptions of the camera's disciplinary powers to state that he does not intend to "creat[e] the depressing impression of an inescapable network of immanent relations of power" (1980: 48). In this regret, he also cites Foucault's claim that "there is no power without resistance". But rather than go on to offer historical instances of this resistance - the faces, perhaps, of anger portrayed against an intrusive medical photography; the play which a woman convict makes for the camera - Tagg instead locates the possibility of resistance

within the changing role of the intellectual.

Basing itself upon Foucault's propositions of "the local character of criticism" (1980: 81), Tagg's assertions here proceed from within that discursive field which establishes the limits between what one can possibly say at any one time, and what is actually said. It is in this respect that we must forget any guaranteed path to resistance, for each instance of force or passivity is beholden to specific conditions of existence which cannot be determined ahead of its time. For Tagg then, the discernment of resistances in the past is useful, but such resistances do not promise the same utility for the present. There are no universal solutions to be found for the problem of political practice:

... we are no longer concerned with the intellectual who deals in generalities, prophecies, and legislative edicts ... but with a whole new configuration of 'specific' intellectuals, strategically situated at precise points in specific sectors by their professional conditions of work and their conditions of life. ... [These] include all kinds of photographers - who have direct and localized relations with particular domains of knowledge and particular institutions, who have an intimate familiarity with the specific constraints which hold there, and who are therefore capable of locating and marking the weak points, the openings, the lines of force (1980: 48-49).

Tagg still leaves in abeyance the question of the individual who is both subject and object of these photographic practices he traces. In placing photographic practices as vehicles of a coherent state power, Tagg necessarily occludes any consideration of how subjects, under the limitations of concrete historical determinants,

operate under these conditions. Yet, in his insistence upon the specific strategies in which photography is used and the institutional spaces in which it has been produced, he offers a way out of what could otherwise be read as the solely prohibitive powers of photography.

What is most interesting about Tagg's statement in this early article is the way in which it signals a growing concern in his later writings. A more recent essay, "God's Sanitary Law: Slum Clearance and Photography in Late 19th C. Leeds" (1988a), again describes the creation and use of photographic evidence, in this case to warrant the razing of Irish and Jewish neighborhoods in East End Leeds. It is a particularly detailed account which finely unravels each political discourse of race and class accumulated in this photographic archive. It also stands in contrast to some of his earlier writings such as that represented in "Power and Photography" (1980). In "God's Sanitary Law", Tagg is careful to stress that the workings of photographic discourse are never unproblematic and unidirectional.

As with any other discursive system, the question we must ask is not, 'What does this discourse reveal of something else?', but, 'what does it do; what are its conditions of existence; how does it inflect its context rather than reflect it; how does it animate meaning rather than discover it; where must we be positioned to accept it as real and true; and what are the consequences of doing so?' (1988a: 119).

The difference between this essay and many of his earlier ones is marked in the distinction between the questions 'What does this discourse reveal of something

else?', and, 'how does it inflect its context rather than reflect it?'. For Tagg's earlier works did tend to maintain the claim that photographic practices were in some way interlocked with, or referred to, a power given in advance. And in placing photography as an extended apparatus of the state, Tagg also slid towards privileging the disciplinary powers of photography. But recently, as in "God's Sanitary Law" or in an interview given to Afterimage (1988b), Tagg's writing proposes a much more manifold consideration of not only the ambitions of photographic archives, but his own critical analysis as well.

In traveling back and forth between the gap represented by these two moments, this chapter examines the liability and value of discursive analyses of photographic practices. Because the status of any photographic criticism - just as it is for any photograph - is inseparable from the specific conditions of existence which traverse it and give it meaning as a practice, the appropriation of Foucauldian discourse analysis by photographic criticism cannot be considered outside of that historical conjuncture which situates and articulates it. As Tagg has described the conditions under which the "Power and Photography" article was produced:

[The original essay] was given as a talk at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London ((February 1979), where it was deliberately couched to follow a lecture ... [which] was volubly committed to street photography, to the idea that Reality is out there on the streets ... it can be possessed and brought back,

and the truth will blow apart ideology. I wanted not only to have a go at this theoretical conception of the Real-out-there and the conception of ideology that goes along with it, but also to suggest that surveilling the streets or getting on the road in search of the Truth were activities implicated in a sorry history and saturated with relations of power. This precipitated me into looking at other kinds of archives, other kinds of materials.

So there was an argument with current practices, but there was also an argument with photo history, pointing to archives that hadn't been engaged with (1988b: 8).

The historical trajectory of Tagg's writings also indicate that the status of a photographic criticism is no more logically implied in its most recent formulation than its original appearance. It is then the entirety of a criticism's history which produces or creates its significance. As Althusser has described the conditions under which certain discourses and practices momentarily cohere; "it is only in the specific unity of the complex structure of the whole that we can think the backwardnesses, forwardnesses, survivals and unevennesses of development which co-exist in the structure of the real historical present: the present of the conjuncture " (1970:106). The use of discourse analysis as a critical practice must then be considered as it is configured from the "backwardnesses" and "forwardnesses" of its discourses and practices over the past decade.

This mode of reading 'backwards' and 'forewards' is necessary in discerning the present historical conjuncture of any form of photographic criticism. As this thesis attempts to explicate, in examining the myriad social

relations involved in the production of photographic criticism - its knowledges and its effects - one must also examine a cultural production which is deeply implicated in and constitutive of power. And in this respect, the use of discourse analysis by photographic criticism offers an important perspective which can be directed not only outwardly, but inwardly. In having to think through those relations of power which at any moment designate a photographic practice, these photographic critics may also be compelled to look at those related beliefs and activities that give their own practice meaning. Using discourse analysis to pare away the instrumental unities of relations, this form of photographic criticism is also given the means to critique the existing conventions of its own discourse: the universalizing, ahistorical, conflict-free and subject or object privileging assumptions which inform the historical present of photographic criticism. This form of photographic criticism has the capacity to illuminate the question of why photographic criticism persists in having vested interests in the continued dissemination of particular knowledges. And it may equally address the means by which photographic criticism suppresses its own conditions of existence.

It is for this reason that the entirety of this mode of criticism must be taken into account; particularly as the move towards a critical self-reflexion is increasingly



evinced in Tagg's latter writings. Indeed, Tagg's most recent article, "Totalled Machines: Criticism, Photography and Technological Change" (1989), now visibly directs its attention to the "machines of explanation" operated by (art) criticism. This is a concern which has become increasingly marked at the entrance of the 1990's. Precipitated by the various refusals of structuralism and post-structuralism - of authorship, origins and authorities - it is also an interest which has been increasingly privileged within the theoretical contours of post-modernism. The next chapter shall address the changes commanded in photographic criticism by the ontological and epistemological shifts of post-modernism; changes which have led not only to a refutation of critical authorities, but also, and contradictorily, a reinstatement of the authorities of photographic criticism.

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## Chapter Seven

### All The Difference in the World: Postmodernist Ruminations on the Last Decade

Centered upon 19th c. photographic archives, the work of Tagg and his contemporaries addresses those conditions which make the truths of photographs so possible and so sustainable. As their concern is with the different struggles and negotiations invested in the fabrication of photographic meaning, these critics lay emphasis upon the historical contingency of this construction. Reinforced by the important theorizations of Michel Foucault, this work not only excavates the truth claims of photographic practices, but also has the capacity to call careful attention to the limits of representation itself.

However, as the majority of these discursive analyses focus upon the invention and representation of a society's 'others' - and of those relations of power involved in this construction - there has been a tendency to place the photograph as the privileged object which exacts domination. And in this respect, this criticism leans towards those 'truths' which it purports to critique. Despite claims for historical contingency, there is still in this writing a desire for certitude and fixed and singular destinations, most notably in the positioning of the photograph as an institutional apparatus of the state. And despite assertions that it is the archive, rather than the photograph, which demands investigation, the focus of these

researches still falls back upon the photographic object. There remains then an aspiration towards determination which is itself built upon a certain evidence: another truth of the photograph. Witness the re-presentation of photographs in the essays in question - the ethnographic typologies, the criminal mug shots, the distorted faces of the mad or the misshapen bodies of the deformed - and one realizes the extent to which a photographic evidence is itself recuperated. The photograph is still moored to an evidential truth: anchored to a 'dominant' ideology; an instrumental identity; a normality; a place held in advance.

It has now become increasingly difficult for photographic critics to enter the field of photographic imagery with the same ease or authority as in former times. Where once a photograph could be considered to refer to some object in 'the real', or harken back to a determinate moment in time, critics are now faced with a particular 'crisis' of representation. This is a 'crisis' which, spurred by theoretical and practical events, calls into question not only the authorities of representation, but the authoritative representations of their own texts.

As critical histories of photography have shown, it is the historical contingency of photographic representation which needs to be addressed in order to investigate, in Foucault's words, "the political and economic interests [truth] serves" (1980: 93). Yet, under this 'crisis', the

conditions of existence for certain photographic 'truths' are becoming more impracticable to map. Changes in photographic technology, the speed with which images appear and disappear, and the unstable and volatile energy of their semiotic processes mean that constructions of truth are increasingly awkward to evaluate. Insofar as the critic is constantly remanded into a changing and motile point of view, the certainty of his or her evaluative claims is also brought under question. The criterion of meaning upon which the truths of both photographs and critics rests progressively slips away.

Consider, for example, the recent development of a still video camera which does not use film, but a small, reusable disc. There is no negative or transparency which can attest to a time-specific construction: a privileged moment between photographer and subject-matter. Neither is the image dependent upon something which may have actually happened in reality; its realistic image could portray something that never existed. As Fred Richin writes of this new technology:

What makes this such a potentially problematic situation is that with the absence of both a permanent negative ... and a print, there is no archival document that can with certainty be called an 'original' photograph. If the photographer re-uses the disc and someone in the editor's office or printing plant decided to manipulate the now ephemeral image in the electronic system, it would be very difficult for a photographer to recall all the details of a situation and point out the changes. Or, conversely, a photographer may decide to significantly modify the image before transmitting or printing it, and the editor might be unable to detect what has happened.

The problems of image authentication become obvious not only in photographic journalism, but also in a court of law, the enforcement of missile verification treaties, and other documentary uses of the photograph (1990: 35).

Of course, the indexical nature of a photograph has never been a guarantee of truth in the image. As those involved in the writing of critical histories of photography assert, "every photograph is the result of specific, and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic and raise the question of the determining level of the material apparatus and of the social practices within which photography takes place" (Tagg, 1988: 2). And yet this "potentially problematic situation" which Richin refers to in the present may propose difficulties for even the most studious of critical historians of photography.

For not only does this unprecedented malleability of photography present problems of verisimilitude, but it also challenges the certainty of critical interpretations. Without the evidence of an original negative or a stable point in time, from what place does a photographic critic now base his or her explanations? Without any semblance of a fixed or essential signification, from what defining horizon does the critic make assertions? The enabling vantage point outside of a discernible signification or outside of a historical moment has collapsed, and with it, the epistemological privilege of a critic. For, if all that exists now is the actuality of the present moment of

photographic activity, then the capacity of a critic to judge, evaluate and interpret in a detached and final manner is abated.

Logically, this would mean that the recognition a critical history of photography demands - that the explanations of a photograph or a critic cannot be dismissed from those concrete historical conditions which inspire and inform it - cannot be ignored. To see a critic's explanations as equally bound to institutional and epistemological situations would be to erode those exclusivist biases which allow authoritative statements (of 'the real', of 'truth', of 'evidence'). And yet, contradictorily, this historical condition, in which "reality has become a pale reflection of the image" (Kearny, 1988: 1-2), and the "omnipresence of self-destructing images simulate each other in a limitless interplay of mirrors" (ibid.: 5), has lent precedence to an ever more ahistorical epistemology. Embracing Jean Baudrillard's world of "absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defense, no retreat" (1983: 133), many photographic critics have left not only those historical differences which articulate the politics of photographic representations, but those differences which constitute their own representational practices as well.

Seemingly, under this ontological construction, the



free-play of image, intertextuality and self-referentiality which supposedly undermines the unitary authorities of both photograph and critic are all that are needed. Since the historical determinations which constitute 'truth' are now more difficult to explicate, the response has often been that there are no more 'truths' to be discovered. This move not only disenfranchises those who are attempting to build new photographic versions of the 'truth', but also exempts critics from examining the establishment of their own 'truthful' assertions.

In what has now become familiar territory, the epistemological and ontological ground that I am marking here belongs to postmodernism. However, in briefly flipping this postmodern coin, I do not wish to occlude the very positive contributions which postmodernism has lent to photographic criticism. The history of postmodernism's appropriation by photographic criticism is a long and protracted one which includes the formation of new and important critical activities. However, to flip the coin again, it has also allowed the reinstatement and creation of textual authorities. While especially active in disarming the photographic canon of modernism, postmodern photographic criticism has also partaken in its own version of canon construction. Hailing the death of the author, it has produced some reified authors of its own. Even as it deconstructs subject status, postmodern photographic criticism has often reconstructed a traditional artistic

subject. Beginning from a post-structuralist theorization of difference, it ends with the proposition of no difference at all. What is most interesting then about this moment are the contradictions of a photographic criticism, which, bathed in the blue light of a 'postmodern scene', remains blind to its own politics.

This chapter looks to the activities and responses of photographic criticism during a period in which the image has been theorized as fully redundant and the optical subject - the subject who sees, experiences and knows - has been theoretically dismissed. This theorization is supposedly anchored to broader transformations in cultural practice, and in this sense, postmodern photographic criticism offers itself to be read as a symptomatic response to specific changing historical conditions in the new world. And yet, one must question just who reflects or reproduces whom in this ontological and epistemological construction. What is it about this affirmative circularity of postmodern theorization and 'postmodern condition' that has kept the explanatory apparatus of criticism intact? Despite the plurality and proliferation now claimed for photography, aspects of a postmodern photographic criticism still exact a totalizing definition and a unified territory for the medium. In order to situate this problematic, and to avoid yet another tendency towards totalizing, the historical context of this criticism must be mapped.

Much of the direction taken by this photographic criticism is dependent upon what has been selectively theorized as being historically superseded - namely, a visual modernism. However, to illustrate the consequences of this selection, it is necessary to point to the plurality of choices available in postmodernisms and modernisms. In effect, the concept of postmodernism has been notoriously difficult to pin down. Throughout the 1980's, its economy grew to such an extent that the word was applied to a diverse array of objects, tendencies and exigencies, ranging from the self-reflexive diegesis of television shows to a general feeling in the world. As Dick Hebdige has stated, after compiling a lengthy list of the concept's applicability, "when it becomes possible to describe all these things as 'postmodern' ... then its clear we are in the presence of a buzzword" (1988: 182).

In 1990, the smoke has cleared somewhat and the semantic ground that postmodernism held is now increasingly falling away. The use of postmodernism as a 'buzzword' has become more of a dead concept, which is what happens to most styles worn after a suitable period. However, in the early eighties, postmodernism's signifying currency was more limited and thus given greater worth as intellectual capital. In the case of photographic criticism, it was strongly marked as a periodizing concept, a "radical break" as Douglas Crimp puts it, with a modernist tradition. Thus, in one example which was to be frequently repeated by

photographic critics, Crimp introduces his 1980 essay "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" with the statement that:

Postmodernism can only be understood as a specific breach with modernism, with those institutions which are the preconditions for and which shape the discourse of modernism. These institutions can be named at the outset: first, the museum; then, art history; and finally, in a more complex sense, because modernism depends upon both its presence and absence, photography" (1980: 91).

It is the selectivity involved in this periodizing concept which has shaped the agenda of a postmodern photographic criticism. In effect, a critical consensus is built around the so-called ruptures of postmodernism - a fission specifically aimed at a modernist aesthetic for photography.

This characterization of a modernist aesthetic is carefully selected and adhered to. It is not the heterogeneous modernism of the surrealists, the constructivists, or the Russian formalists; not the modernism of John Heartfield or Alexander Rodchenko; a modernism which - working precisely upon the problematic of representation - demanded an active role on the part of the viewer. Rather, the modernism which is dispatched by this photographic criticism is the modernism of Clement Greenberg, and after him, John Szarkowski. It is a modernism where fictions of the mastery of the expressive individual subject and the autonomy of the work of art are as easily read as they are dismissed.

In the Fall of 1977, Douglas Crimp curated the exhibition Pictures at Artist's Space in New York City. Regarded as the first curatorial articulation of postmodernism, Pictures included works by Tony Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherry Levine, Robert Longo and Philip Smith. In a latter related essay, Crimp places these artists as representing a "predominant sensibility among the current generation of younger artists" (1979: 75). In so doing, he claims a certain vanguardism for these new photographic artists. Moreover, he signals a shift within art in general: a shift away from the essential objects of a modernist art to an emphasis upon the activity of art; more so, the signifying activity between art work and spectator.

Over the past decade we have witnessed a radical break with the modernist tradition, effected precisely by a preoccupation with the 'theatrical'. The work that has laid most serious claim to our attention throughout the seventies has been situated between, or outside the individual arts, with the result that the integrity of the various mediums - those categories the exploration of whose essences and limits constituted the very project of modernism - has dispersed into meaninglessness. ... [A]rt ... as an ontological category, has been put into question (1979: 76).

Like Rosalind Krauss (1977) before him, Crimp accentuates the theatricality of an art that is grounded within both the present moment and the presence of the spectator. Again cueing modernism's demise, Crimp affirms that it is no longer the specificity of the medium which matters, but the ways in which the work is activated by and activates the viewing subject. What is recalled here then

is Barthes' "birth of the reader at the cost of the death of the Author" (1977: 148); a death which also carries the limits or closure of a text with it to the grave. As Crimp thus writes of Jack Goldstein's performance/films, "no action is really brought to closure; the performance stops but it cannot be said to end" (1979: 79). Or, as he writes of Cindy Sherman's photographic series of ambiguous self-portraits/film stills, their "narrative ambience is stated but never fulfilled" (ibid.: 81-83). To further evoke this lack of closure, Crimp quotes Barthes from "The Third Meaning" (1977); "In short, these are photographs whose condition is that of the film still, that fragment, 'whose existence never exceeds the fragment'" (ibid.).

However, Crimp's interest in these new works extends beyond their theatricality and engagement with and by the spectator. He marks this move in order to begin to address what is seen as a new perspective on, and questioning of, the basis of representation itself. For Crimp, the significant difference and possibility of signification for these works demands the presence of the spectator, for it is with the spectator, rather than the artist, that the meaning of the work is produced. And yet, this definition of presence is extended to speak of an absence: an absence which marks the conditions and the limits of representation. Crimp emphasizes a spectating subject whose search to find an 'original' moment or authentic event lying at the basis of representation is consistently thwarted. Drawn into an

ambiguous space where the truth and the lie contest one another, the spectating subject is left to flounder within a conversation which contradictorily preserves silence. Crimp's interest in these artists then pertains to what he sees as what is both there and not there in the work: the presence and the simultaneous erasure of the presence of the artist, the performance, the work itself. It is specifically the photographic medium which allows advantage to this interrogation of representation. As Crimp writes in his 1980 essay, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism":

Golstein and Longo are artists whose work, together with that of a great number of their contemporaries, approaches the question of representation through photographic modes, particularly all those aspects of photography that have to do with reproduction, with copies, and copies of copies. The extraordinary presence of their work is effected through absence, through its unbridgeable distance from the original, from even the possibility of an original. Such presence is what I attribute to the kind of photographic activity I call postmodernist (1980: 94).

Contradictorily, Crimp veers from refuting the importance of a medium's specificity, (in order to prioritize the meaning production of a viewing subject), back to privileging the 'presence' and signifying activity of a single medium - photography. Cannot this reversion, which again emphasizes the specific capabilities of the medium, only represent an inversion of Szarkowski's modernist aesthetic for photography? Yet, the inconsistency of this move is explained as less revisionist than

progressive as it theoretically extends from post-structuralism to postmodernism. Basing itself upon post-structuralist concerns with intertextuality, polysemy and the meaning production of the reading/viewing subject, this critical approach reaches for concepts of postmodernism, especially as they pertain to the mechanical reproduction of photography, to posit with finality the 'death of the author' - the death of origins and authenticity. In this regard, its enmity towards a modernist aesthetic for photography becomes a primary agenda for its operations. Consistently invoking Walter Benjamin's statement that, "[t]hat which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art" (1973: 221), critics such as Crimp place priority upon the capacity of photography to deplete the aura, the "fabric of tradition" which encloses the work of art.

It is against this tradition, this invented (a)history of the work of art, that the manifold arsenal of a postmodern photography is seen to be posed. In one respect, photography's capacity for multiplication and repetition is aimed against the museum, that "judgment seat" wherein connoisseurship of the original is institutionalized and made "traditional", unchallengable, and untouchable. "It is not, after all," Crimp writes, "by chance that the era of modernism coincides with the era of the museum" (1979: 88). The plurality of photographic representation is thus counterposed against the pluralism of the museum; a



pluralism which renders all within its walls as equally poised and placid in its authenticity. Crimp begins "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" with the statement that:

Postmodernism is about art's dispersal, its plurality, by which I certainly do not mean pluralism. Pluralism is, as we know, that fantasy that art is free, free of all other discourses, institutions, free, above all, of history. And this fantasy of freedom can be maintained because every work of art is held to be absolutely unique and original. Against this pluralism of originals, I want to speak of the plurality of copies (1980: 91).

In another, and very important respect, the politics of postmodern photographic practice and criticism has been directed against art photography itself; whose very existence as a 'work of art' entailed the grafting of a liberal pluralism with a modernist aesthetic. Occupied with pointing to the cracks in art photography's foundation, postmodern photographic criticism began by drawing attention not only to the flaws in the design of a photographic formalism, but in the invention of a unique and autonomous individual subject; both of whose status as invisible truths were increasingly coming to light, and under attack, during the late seventies. The activity of a postmodern photographic practice was thus seen as a two-fold assault upon the concealed and concealing fictions of a photographic modernism. Using photography's mechanics of multiplicity, postmodern photographic practice worked to pull back the shroud which represents a 'presence', but which, in effect,

conceals nothing behind it: no unique and unitary subject; no authentic art. As Crimp writes:

[These artists] working with photography have addressed photography's claims to originality, showing photography to be always a representation, always-already-seen. Their images are purloined, confiscated, appropriated, stolen. In their work, the original cannot be located, is always deferred; even the self which might have generated an original is shown to be itself a copy (1980: 98).

Referring to the ways in which postmodern photographic practices appropriate, manipulate and expose the cultural values of modernism, photographic critics have acknowledged that these photographic practices are as complicit with, as they are directed against, photography-as-art. Yet this collusion with art photography is seen to extend only so far as it allows "the postmodern activity of photography" to "subvert and exceed [it]", ... "to show that it too is now only an aspect of the copy, not the original" (ibid.: 98). Informed by the theoretical practices of post-structuralism, these photographers and critics have recognized that there is no vantage point outside - no real - from which to challenge the politics of representation. There is only that 'reality' in and as it is constituted by representation. Similarly, taking up post-structuralism's refutation of an authorial and original individual subject, they also assert the constitution of subjectivity through representation; the 'self [is] itself a copy'.

Yet with the conceptualizations of certain postmodern theorists, these critics not only concede that the

oppositional practices of modernism have become increasingly untenable, but impossible. Hence, postmodern photography's practices of theft, parody and pastiche enacted are from within the cultural apparatus in question. If there is no more authentic substance left, no more real which is prior to the image, then there is nothing else to do but to play with those distinctions and hierarchies already built, and show up their provisional status. The only 'art' which remains to be celebrated is artifice. As Fredric Jameson has written of postmodern art practices, " ... all that is left is to ... speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum" (1983: 115).

Basing itself then upon post-structuralism's question, 'what's the difference?', this photographic practice and criticism took up postmodernism's answer that there was, really, no essential difference at all. In an often-mentioned example, the so-called original copy of Edward Weston's "Study of Neil" , is, for all intensive purposes, no different than the re-photographed copy which Sherrie Levine presented, with her name typed neatly below. Both are representations which, while referring to an original - in Weston's case the living Neil in 1926; in Levine's the 'original' Weston - never comes to end at that point. As Crimp explains in "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism" (1980):

It is only in the absence of the original that representation takes place. And representation takes place because it is already there in the world as

representation. ... The apriori Weston had in mind was not really in his mind at all; it was in the world and Weston only copied it (1980: 98-99).

Renouncing the possibility of an a priori - either in the human mind or in the human world -- postmodern photographic practices work at explicating the absence of any original difference. A deconstructive pastiche, enacted from within the field of representation, is used to demonstrate the emptiness which difference veils. This is a photographic practice which operates collusively with art photography in order to frustrate and critically underscore the latter's pretensions to aura, scarcity and authenticity. And yet there are difficulties with a parodic practice of pastiche which excavates and erases differences. At what point does an internal critique become itself part of that apparatus which it seeks to subvert? As an artistic practice, does not a postmodern photography also remain hinged to those same discourses of aura and authenticity which it replays and plays with? When does its replications become a reinforcement for the very logic it attempts to dismantle? And what, at end, is there to differentiate the authorial subjectivity of an art photographer from the subjectivity of a postmodern 'pasticheur'? Where is the difference in claiming no difference?

These questions were to increasingly plague postmodern photographic criticism during the course of the 1980's. And in many key respects, the manner in which they were answered, or ignored, speaks as much of the operations of

photographic criticism as it does the photographic practice. Detailing the theoretical and political activities of a postmodern photographic practice, photographic criticism worked upon a number of assumptions which not only fueled these questions, but acted to deflect them. Moreover, and paradoxically, these are assumptions which not only protect the continuance of the value judgments of critics, but the value of the photography in question.

In the early critical writings of Abigail Solomon-Godeau, one may detect the beginnings of a critical tactic which both draws attention to and disguises the liabilities of a postmodern photographic project. In her article "Playing in the Fields of the Image" (1982), Solomon-Godeau also charts the repudiations of a post-modern photographic practice. Like Crimp, she sees this refusal as directed towards the cultural values which have traditionally upheld the status of art photography. Yet unlike Crimp, she places the inception of this refusal, not at a 'theatrical minimalism', but in a post-structuralist photography, whose practitioners (including Victor Burgin, Gilbert and George, and the Bechers), are "seen as linked by a common absence of authorial presence, vision and subjectivity" (1982: 11). Departing then from this basis of post-structuralism, the postmodern artists which Solomon-Godeau speaks of are seen to have already completed their rites of absolution from the stain of artistic subjectivity. Their authorial status as

artists is thus already, and securely, exhausted. Moreover, it is their specific mode of photographic practice which insures this absence of a unitary and authorial subjectivity. Deconstruction, rather than opposition, becomes the key modus operandi here. Representation is peeled back, and like an onion, reveals nothing inherently different at its base. Deconstructed and denied a place neither in the image, nor in the subjective vision of the artist, meaning is thus only reconstructed with the viewer:

By foregrounding these mechanisms [of photographic meaning] in their work, [these artists] attempt to turn them back in on themselves, enforcing an active, rather than passive (i.e., contemplative) reading on the part of the viewer. Pastiche is thus an ideal instrument both of construction and deconstruction. It might be noted that it is in its deconstructive intention and effect that one distinguishes pastiche as a radical practice from pastiche as a symptom of creative impoverishment (1982: 11).

What is interesting about this statement is not only the somewhat defensive maneuvering to claim a radical practice for postmodern photographic practices, but the ways in which this stratagem also manages to defend the claim for authorship hidden at its base. For in juxtaposing a radical practice against a 'creative impoverishment', Solomon-Godeau suggests that the artists of which she speaks are in no way lacking in authorial and original subjectivity. Having hollowed out a modernist artistic subjectivity, this photographic criticism simply re-introduces a post-modernist version in its place: a self which is itself a copy, but a creative one at that. This contradictory move is also

exampled in Solomon-Godeau's tendency to dismiss the subjectivity of an artistic subject, while claiming an active and knowing subjectivity for the viewer. "Meaning ... resides in the knowing and decoding activity of the viewer" (ibid.: 12). Left untheorized, this active and knowing subjectivity remains indistinct and unspecified. Removed from the context of history and identity, it becomes difficult to comprehend how or what exactly this spectating subject 'knows'. Solomon-Godeau ends this article with the statement that:

Within the range and context of the kinds of photographic practice I have discussed, the notion of subjectivity and self-expression is less disputed than considered to be entirely besides the point. The photographer's personal vision, sensibility, or capacity for self-expression is assumed to be of interest only to his or her friends, families, lovers or analysts. While the aesthetic of consumption (photographic or otherwise) requires an heroicized myth of the artist, the exemplary practice of the player-off of codes requires only an operator, a producer, a scriptor, or a pasticheur (ibid.: 13).

While exempting subjectivity, this photographic criticism still exacts an 'exemplary' and authoritatively productive subjectivity for the artists in question. In dismissing the notion of subjectivity altogether - as altogether a dead subject - no historical or ideological basis is given to articulate exactly why these postmodern artists are constituted any differently than their modernist counterparts. Moreover, it is a disinterested subjectivity that is proposed; a subjectivity, in effect, which remains removed from the historical contingency of the world; a

subjectivity not unlike that constructed for the male photographers of a formalist modernism.

In this postmodern photography, irony and ambiguity are predominant. Placing both the art photograph and the creative author/artist within visual quotation marks draws attention to those fictions underlying nominative terms. This bracketing off creates the 'unbridgeable distance' which Crimp mentions; a distance which is also accompanied by a knowing irony. All enunciations, all statements, are framed, contained; made available to a postmodernist pun that indeed there is no emperor underneath the clothes.

This aversion to naming, to exhibiting a 'true' or naked self or subject to the world is also applied by postmodern photographic artists themselves. A number of photographic critics quote certain autobiographical statements from postmodern photographers. Attesting to a de-centered and ambiguous subjectivity, these quotations are presented as evidence not only of the absence of an authorial and authentic subject, but as testimony of a simulated society. Thus Crimp offers an autobiographical anecdote from Sherrie Levine which ends with the statement: "My first self remains at a distance, impassive, ironical, and watching" (1980: 98). Interpreting her comments as symptomatic of her work, Crimp finds that, "Levine's autobiographical statement is only a string of quotations pilfered from others" (ibid.). Similarly, Solomon-Godeau writes of Richard Prince:



Prince's rejection of traditional notions of authorship, while less programmatic than Levine's, have nonetheless originated in a comparable understanding of the conditions of a spectacular society. Prince has quite precisely described his relation to authorship (as well as his own working method) in the following text:

'His way to make it new was to make it again ... and making it again was enough for him and certainly, personally speaking, 'almost him'.'

The notion of identity as 'almost him' functions as an analogue to a fully conventionalised reality composed of images or simulacra; reality can no more be located in the world than 'authenticity' in the author (1984: 99).

Interestingly, this tendency to read an artist's subjectivity as symptomatic of the world is one of modernism's most tenacious concepts. It is a notion which posits the artist as a privileged source of meaning and value. In this case, the self-present, self-conscious Cartesian subject has now left. But his replacement, this ambiguous, ironical and self-reflexive 'almost him' who is only a fictional stand-in for that which is now gone (the real thing), holds similar motives for subjective authority. His absence is in effect only the inverse of a self-present and prescient subject. It still betrays a narcissistic interest; that of a world constructed/fractured in the artist's image. With his use of a fictional, third-person narrative, Prince offers the ersatz experience of his own sensations of dislocation and denial in a simulated society. This distanced impression of losing one's footing in unreal territory (and enjoying the fall) works to reflexively undermine the fixed position of a Cartesian subject. And

yet the replacement of a centered, knowing and unified 'I' with an off-centered and partial 'almost him' also entails the privileging of one fictive world above all others.

Replacing an exercise of revelation and interpretation with disguise and displacement thus exacts its own political liabilities: in this case, a political neutrality. To be recognized is to be drawn into history, to be placed in time, and the exacting recognitions of (an art) history is what this photography is counterposed against. Irony and ambiguity shelter the photographer against the specific effects of history; leaving 'him' free from having to stake a claim in politics or meaning. As Dick Hebdige writes of the postmodern 'dandy':

To live ironically is to live without decidable emotion; to be ambiguous is to refuse to 'come out' (of the now). It is to maintain a delicate and impotent reserve.

... The only history that exists here is the history of the signifier and that is no history at all (1988: 171).

This exemption of history demonstrates, as it is productive of, a certain strategy on the part of photographic critics to recuperate that which they precisely proclaim is now lost: namely, an avant-gardist artistic subject. Without the interruptions of a historical context, a postmodernist photographic criticism can continue to safely proclaim a privileged space for its artists. With history rendered to a repository of surface images and vanquished heroes, there is nothing to historicize the practices of both these postmodern photographers and their

celebratory critics. Severed from its conditions of existence, this photographic criticism is left to revitalize another disinterested and autonomous subject. By abandoning the problematic of 'the subject' and subjectivity altogether, this criticism reproduces that which it seeks to refute. It is interesting in this respect that the most visible and commodified photographic canon after modernism is a postmodern photography.

I will continue with the development of this trajectory momentarily. However, at this time, I want to point out that not all postmodern photographic practices are solely based upon a negation of a modernist aesthetic, nor do they entail the same reproductive effects. Where a postmodern photographic practice becomes most successful for photographic critics is when it is directed not simply against a modernist aesthetic - against those reified proper names of past 'masters' - but when this concept of 'mastery' is drawn into and revealed in its socio-cultural context. In particular, postmodern photographic works which exact a feminist critique - and are posed against historically specific ideologies, rather than a now deadened aesthetic - are felt by critics to escape much of the stylistic recuperations of their colleagues.

In a 1982 statement for a Documenta catalogue, Barbara Kruger writes:

We loiter outside of trade and speech and are obliged to steal language. We are very good mimics. We

replicate words and pictures and watch them stray from  
or coincide with your notions of fact and fiction  
(1982: 286).

For those familiar with Kruger's work, the tenor of  
this speech replicates the antagonistic words superimposed  
across her images. In the majority of these works, the  
'you' addressed here is a masculine subject. The 'we' who  
'loiter outside' are women, and as those who are rarely the  
subjects, but more often the mythologized and commodified  
objects of representation, women have had a great interest  
in the photographic strategies of appropriation. In  
purloining the over-determined imagery of the female, women  
artists have been instrumental in playing the image against  
itself in different ways; breaking down and decoding the  
reified representations of a masculine vision. And as those  
traditionally excluded from the ensemble of power relations  
which constitute artistic representation, women have most  
certainly 'loitered outside'.

Increasingly, women artists were to use the  
deconstructive operations of appropriation not only to  
disarticulate the differentiations of a modernist  
epistemology and aesthetic, but also the sexual division  
which such difference belies. And increasingly,  
photographic critics were to theorize the political  
articulations of a feminist photographic practice of  
appropriation which critiqued patriarchal representation.  
In her 1984 essay, "Winning the Game When the Rules Have  
Been Changed: Art Photography and Postmodernism", Abigail

Solomon-Godeau points to the serious stakes which a feminist critique lays down in postmodern photographic practice. Thus, in one example, she pushes Levine's re-photograph of Weston's "Study of Neil" beyond the aesthetic limits of deconstruction. In contrast to Crimp, who focused upon the work's displacement of an artistic authorship, Solomon-Godeau examines how it not only involves the deconstruction of notions of originality and authenticity, but also undermines the patriarchal authority based upon such notions. Thus, Levine's appropriation of this photograph does not simply bring to the fore the constructed authorities of 'an original master of photography', but also reveals the way this privileged vision has so often (particularly in photography) stood in for sexual privilege. Levine's wholesale theft of this image undermines not only the aesthetic or legal, but the paternal authorship of Weston. Solomon-Godeau states:

Levine's refusal of traditional notions of authorship has social and political implications as well. ... the notion of the author is integrally linked with that of patriarchy; to contest the dominance of one, is implicitly to contest the power of the other (1984: 91).

In this article, Solomon-Godeau is primarily concerned with work which she sees as "more centrally located within feminist discourse" (ibid.: 99), and thus addresses the appropriative photographic practices of Vikky Alexander, Sylvia Kolbowski and Barbara Kruger. Of Kruger's work, she writes of how it "appropriate[s] not only the images

themselves ... but the disembodied voice of patriarchal authority" (1984: 101). Describing this political act of theft in an earlier essay, (1982), Solomon-Godeau refers to one photograph in which Kruger has juxtaposed the text, "You have searched and destroyed", against an image of a lock of blond hair run through by a particularly vicious-looking brush. As Solomon-Godeau points out, Kruger does not so much bring to the fore the contradictions between the two, (breaking the compositional unity of image and text), as she reveals the patriarchal base of surveillance and oppression. The hair divided and impaled by the brush, and the words, "search and destroyed", points to the mutual entanglement of sexual division and representation at the same time that it works to unravel some of the strands of this relationship. As a militaristic term, "search and destroy" raises the issues of the dominant relations of specularly in both male gendering in particular and war and oppression in general. Thus, as Solomon-Godeau points out, (ibid.), Kruger's work is less an activity of pastiche, then it is a stringent critique of both the real and representational violence done to women, and the active relations between representation and sexed subjectivity which engender such relations.

The very positive contribution, and distinction, of these feminist works lies in the way they consistently hold the image responsible for the reproduction of sexual

difference. In contrast to other photographic artists who, utilizing a mode of pastiche, lean towards an apolitical celebration of artifice,<sup>(1)</sup> these feminist photographic practices directly capture and interrogate the differences representation makes. In a similar manner, and for similar ends, the question of subjectivity is never elided, nor is it simply unified and presumed to be (authorially) male. Experiencing one's subjectivity as a tangle of contradictions is something which is strongly familiar to women. Resistance to patriarchy has been articulated as a general resistance to the suppression of difference, just as it can be described as a struggle within that difference which constitutes subject-positions; which make it possible to think, act, photograph or look in a certain way. Subjectivity becomes a crucial battleground in this respect.

Interestingly, this contestory terrain of subjectivity upon which feminists have long fought came to be discovered, or rather, appropriated, by postmodernism. More interesting, it came to fall within the authorial purview of male critics; most notoriously in the case of Craig Owens.<sup>(2)</sup>

Owens, very sadly, just died this summer (July 4, 1990) of AIDS. In a recent obituary published by Art in America, (for which Owens worked as senior editor), Nancy Marmer writes:

In his 1983 essay, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism", Craig made what Susan Suileman (in her recent book, Subversive Intent) called "one of those conceptual leaps that later turn out to have initiated a whole new train of thought. Simply, what

Owens did was to theorize the political implications of the intersection between the 'feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodern critique of representation'" (1990: 184).

I do not wish to dispute the extremely important contributions which Owens has made in his critical writings on postmodernism, sexual difference and issues of sexuality and gender. However, I want to signal the propensity with which feminism's critique of an androcentric culture becomes embraced and enclosed within the new found revelations of postmodern critics. Besides Suileman's ovation of Owen's ground-breaking 'conceptual leap', it is unfortunate that she chooses to quote one of Owen's most difficult statements in the entire essay; that which posits a "feminist critique of patriarchy" on the one hand, and a "postmodern critique of representation" on the other. Owen's writes after this differentiation, "My intention is not to posit identity between these two critiques; nor is it to place them in a relation of antagonism or opposition (1983: 59). But the fact of the matter is, Owens has already identified a difference between the two: feminism critiques patriarchy; postmodernism critiques representation. As the entire range of Owens' essay revolves around feminist artists who address issues of representation and sexuality, this statement is confusing at best. As Owens writes, " ... their subject, feminine sexuality, is always constituted in and as representation, a representation of difference" (ibid.: 71).

More contradictorily, it is feminism's insistence on



difference which allows Owens to subsume its theoretical and critical project into the possession of postmodernism.

"Women's insistence on difference and incommensurability may not only be compatible with, but also an instance of postmodern thought" (ibid.: 61-62). Relegated to an instance of postmodernism, ironically the political differences of feminist critique are erased. The consequences of this move entail another form of appropriation: of a feminist politics for an often apolitical postmodernism.

Owens in this article also notes that writing for women involves a form of critical cross-dressing. "In order to speak, to represent herself, a woman assumes a masculine position" (ibid.: 59). While there are difficulties with this position, (in the way it, again, eliminates the historical differences of women and assumes a male speaking-position as the only tenable place to talk), I would like to use it to point to how the marginalization or occlusion of feminist critique by postmodernism has also been undertaken by female critics. Moreover, I want to address this move as it refers, on a more general level, to the complicity which exists between a postmodern photographic criticism and androcentric cultural authorities.

In her essay, "A Note on Photography and the Simulacra", (1984), Rosalind Krauss describes the film stills/self-portraits of Cindy Sherman. Under a feminist critique, these photographs, particularly in their

constantly shifting and ambiguous characterizations, can be read as an evasion of a fixed feminine identity. But Krauss here prefers only to locate Sherman's work as a postmodern marker for the demise of artistic, rather than patriarchal, authority. What at once could be read as a stringent feminist practice of re-turning a masculine look, now only exists as an aesthetic contemplation of the loss of artistic privilege. The masculine prerogative which stands behind and in the aesthetic is left unaddressed. Positing Sherman's photographs as an example "of what it looks like to engage the photographic simulacrum in order to explode the unities of art" (1984: 63), Krauss only directs her observations to the supposed ruin of an aesthetic construction. Moreover, her attention is so riveted upon this event that she claims, not sexual difference, but the difference of artistic subjectivity to be "the fundamental difference on which all other differences are based" (1984: 59). While I do not wish to imply that sexual difference stands for all the difference in the world, conversely, Krauss's statement belies a similar reductivity.

That Sherman is both subject and object of these images is important to their conceptual coherence. For the play of stereotype in her work is a revelation of the artist herself as stereotypical. It functions as a refusal to understand the artist as a source of originality, a fount of subjective response, a condition of critical distance from the world which it confronts but of which it is not a part. The inwardness of the artist as a reserve of consciousness that is fundamentally different from the world of appearances is a basic premise of Western art. It is the fundamental difference on which all other

differences are based. If Sherman were photographing a model who was not herself, then her work would be a continuation of this notion of the artist as consciousness which is both anterior to the world and distinct from it, a consciousness that knows the world by judging it (ibid.: 59-62).

To say that Krauss has merely missed the point here would be an understatement. For her failure to observe a feminist strategy in Sherman's photographs represents not just an oversight, but the particular demands of her photographic criticism and its complicity with the honorific celebration of a new, anti-aesthetic. Her exclusive focus upon the internal combustion of a Western art is a comfortable one. Yet the liabilities exacted from the coziness of an internal critique include not only a dismissal of other important differences, but a reinforcement of the defensive territory of criticism. A feminist practice which is grounded in and explicates the differential power relations at work in the material conditions of women's lives is superseded by an apolitical reinstatement of photographic criticism's traditional operations and object of inquiry. Krauss's writing masks its own structuring oppositions under a celebration of "nondifferentiation". It never moves beyond the replications of photographic texts to confront political differences.

Underneath Krauss's acclamations of the "collapse of (aesthetic) difference"; the demise of a "critical distance from the world which it confronts, but is not a part" and "a

consciousness that knows the world by judging it", lies a strategy to, contradictorily, keep the machinery of photographic criticism running. Her explanations as to why Sherman's work necessitates self-portraiture - that had she photographed a model other than herself, her work would only reconstruct the conditions of critical distance - signals the cultivation of a particular method on the part of photographic critics to claim for themselves a position of self-critique, while retaining a privileged position of judgmental authority. Sherman's work is thus mined as a metaphor for a new photographic criticism:

Sherman's work stands in an inverse relation to critical discourse, having herself understood photography as the Other of art, the desire of art in our time. Thus her use of photography does not construct an object for art criticism, but constitutes an act of such criticism (1984: 68).

The collapse of distance and difference represented by postmodern photographic practices is seen to necessitate a recognition by photographic critics that their own work cannot be held at a remove. As their enabling vantage points cave in, photographic critics cannot ignore the participation of their writings in the constitution of a differentiating judgment. For Craig Owens, this particular situation, "poses a challenge to criticism ... specifically to the critics substitution of his own discourse for the work of art" (1983: 69). Contradictorily, in an essay which purports to 'speak for' women, and renders them as vehicles for a postmodern 'difference', what Owens refers to here is

"the indignity of speaking for others" (ibid.). Presumably, as the enabling ground of differentiation gives way, the critic is left with the realization that his or her words are as equally apprehended within differential power relations as any empirical contest. And yet, for the majority of photographic critics, the primary 'indignity' involved is that of losing a place to speak. The problem of a critic's representations in a field of 'nondifferentiation' is thus met with textual correctives. And more often than not, it has entailed "the substitution of his own discourse for the work of art".

In effect, the challenge posed to critical discourse is met by restructuring critical writing in the name of a post-criticism. Thought to demystify a critic's textual remoteness, post-criticism advocates the appropriation and collage of different writings and allegorical procedures in order to un-anchor the author of the text and refer the reader to the different possibilities of interpretation available. As the main proponent of this textual strategy puts it, "post-critics write with the discourses of others (the already written)" (Ulmer, 1983: 96). Thus, writers and theoreticians as diverse and disparate as Mikhail Bakhtin, Edward Said, Julia Kristeva and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari will be called to order within the same essay.

At best, post-criticism becomes a metaphor for an ideal situation. At worst, it simply works to further the disengagement of appropriated writings from their historical

and theoretical contexts. Moreover, such pretenses to a non-hierarchical and plural text - despite the claims of their supporters - do not have consequences globally (signaling a 'world condition'), but parochially.

Photographic criticism is not played out in the streets where we live, but in the halls of academia, the museum, the gallery, and the art journal. It pertains more to questions of socially and locally constituted power than textually constituted authority. It is the politics of photographic criticism - the collection and sale of photographic works; the issues of tenure, publication and cultural capital - which conditions the production of photographic criticism; not, as supposed by post-critics, the multivocality of a critical text. Whatever authority is produced in the text pertains more to the powerful sensibilities of the institution of photographic criticism, than a general sensibility thought to be now active in the world.

While post-critics may believe that their own textual deconstructions of authority contributes to or mimics a wholesale demise of differential power relations, they may also be establishing their own authorial claims of difference. Despite a postmodernist photographic critic's assertion of a 'merely quantitative array of difference' (Krauss, 1984: 59), which supposedly collapses qualitative distinctions, these distinctions (of class, of gender, of race, of high culture and low culture) continue to exist,

particularly with the purview of photographic criticism. The dismissal of these distinctions in fact serves to veil the social positions and power relations of photographic critics; concealing the political limitations of a practice which is precisely predicated upon hierarchies of class and status.

The denial of difference thus works to revive, as it camouflages, a critic's position within social formations. Acclamations of 'no difference', or, on the other side of the coin, 'all the difference in the world', are strategically managed towards similar ends: the elision of those historically constituted differences which effect and expose a critic's practice. With historical interruptions safely silenced, critics may continue with their judgmental business as usual.

Ironically, it was the very success of postmodern photographic practices which drew attention to and divulged the consequences of a photographic criticism of indifference. The rumblings of dissent began to appear as early as 1983, when Crimp began the catalogue essay for an exhibition of 'appropriation photography' by indicating the exhaustion of a critical practice stretched too far.

... appropriation, pastiche, quotation - these methods can now be seen to extend to virtually every aspect of our culture, from the most cynically calculated products of fashion ... to the most committed critical activities of artists ... And if all aspects of the culture use this new operational mode, then the mode itself cannot articulate a specific reflection upon that culture (1983: 27).

In effect, postmodern practices of appropriation were quickly rendered to a commodified and copied style. Artists themselves were quick to catch on and copy a successful pattern. As Solomon-Godeau recounts this derivative practice: "By 1983, plundering the pages of glossy magazines, shooting advertisements from the television set, or 'simulating' photographic tableau that might have come from either of the media, had become as routine an activity in the more sophisticated art schools as slopping paint on canvas" (1987: 8).

As these tendencies to aspiration and derivation illustrate, it is now indisputable that a canon of postmodern photographers has been constituted. In 1979, Crimp foretold that, as the demise of modernism coincides with the downfall of the museum, "we now have to look for aesthetic activities in so-called alternative spaces, outside the museum ... because these activities ... pose questions that are postmodernist" (1979: 88). Yet the critical marginality that once could be claimed for postmodern photographic practices in 1979 is no longer possible. Many of the artists that Crimp and Solomon-Godeau heralded at the beginning of the eighties have now won fame. These are the artists that are currently positioned as the exemplars and progenitors of a postmodern photography. Moreover, as their status as authors has risen, so too has their fortunes.

As Richard Bolton has recently pointed out (1989), the .



New York dealer Mary Boone sells Barbara Kruger's works for around \$30,000. Sherrie Levine's rephotographed 'versions' of Alexander Rodchenko's work - "early pieces praised for their challenge to beliefs about commodification and authorship" (ibid.: 13) - now can be purchased from the same dealer for \$2,000 each. Cindy Sherman's early "Untitled Film Stills", which appeared in nearly every essay announcing the arrival of a new critical photographic practice, now go for \$1,000 to \$4,000, (whereas they originally sold for \$50 each). Her latest works are now priced at \$8,500 each and \$15,000 for diptychs (ibid.) Clearly, these are high prices for photographs, whose mechanical status insures the absence of an original.

Most ironically, the exigency posed for photographic critics now turns upon a play of tensions pulled from the designation of 'originality'. In one respect, the widespread reduplication of postmodern photographic practices in artistic and commercial culture exemplifies, as it compliments, a postmodern refusal of originality. In another respect, this tendency itself contributes to and necessitates a commodified canon of postmodern photographers. The original progenitors of the practice must be distinguished from the copyists. This particular designation of originality represents not only attempts to retain a certain critical edge for 'authentic' postmodern photographic practices (even if now that 'edge' only gleams

in the past), but also exposes the particular 'author functions' (Foucault) demanded by a supposedly authorless age.

The problem thus turns upon both the rebuttal and the assertion of originality, and the difficulty of knowing when to mark a difference between the two. Asked in the language of authenticity, the question now posed to postmodern photography is, where does its value and worth as a critical practice now lie? What is left to differentiate a derivative style from an original critique? As Solomon-Godeau asks, 'Where today, in the age of Reagan, is the place of critical practice and what is it in opposition to?' (1987: 4).

Clearly, these questions point to the problems engendered by the blurring of illusory boundaries between commercial and artistic culture. But they also signal the need, and the difficulties, of not only locating critical practice within that cultural apparatus which it seeks to contest, but photographic criticism as well. For as the critic is the principle agent who indicates the influences of a photographic practice - thus marking its worth - the complicity involved in the production of interpretation and explanation of photography and the production of a photographic canon is increasingly brought into view. The changing inflections of postmodern photographic practices - and the shifts in the ways it has been variously hailed as a critical operation of property theft or disparaged as a

collusive style - have necessitated a much larger debate pertaining to the attendant problematic of photographic criticism. In searching for a practical difference between homage and critique, critics are increasingly faced with the task of prising open some of the more implicit claims attached to the mantle of their own differentiating practice.

Perhaps one of the first complaints to be leveled against the presumed critical activity of a postmodern photographic practice was voiced by Martha Rosler in 1982. In her article, "Notes on Quotes", Rosler expressed problems with photographic strategies of appropriation, specifically those that appropriated representations whole, without any or little change in the literal reproduction of the image.

But replicating oppressive forms, whether by quoting them directly or through the fashioning of simulacra, may replicate oppressiveness. Further, the works at issue imply a totalizing or systemic critique. Implicating the whole system is logically unsatisfactory; if an assertion encompasses an entire universe, there is no vantage point outside from which to make or understand the critique (1982: 11).

Rosler's remarks here express a desire for an a priori oppositional place of critical relation. The claim that people need a privileged place of sight to perceive and engage in ideological critique evokes a modernist position based upon the presumption of an already existing alliance. Rosler in effect demands a necessary correspondence between a representation and its politics, while proposing a detached spectator as the only individual in the position to

discern this relation. Similarly, she remarks that, "the work seems a slicked up version of the original, a new commodity" (ibid.). But these are all modernist objections. In a postmodern world, they would most likely be answered with the Foucauldian actuality, restated by Victor Burgin, that "the market is 'behind' nothing, it is in everything" (1986: 174).

However, moving beyond totalizing retorts, Rosler's remarks must be taken and answered more comprehensively. What does Rosler mean when she affirms only the effectivity of a critical practice enacted from 'outside'? Outside of what? Marginality, once a safe place in many privileged and patronizing conceptions of the word, is put into doubt under recent theoretical and lived events; events which force the acknowledgment that the relations between representation, subjectivity and experience (of a politics) are those which are always in process; unstable, unfixed, and produced in specific situations of signification. And while there are 'outsides', and people who inhabit them, these places are never fixed absolutes, guaranteed by their origin or intrinsic essences, but are rather cross-cut and intersected by a variety of discourses and determinations. These are recognitions that entail implications not only for the critical practice of photography, but also photographic criticism as well.

In her 1987 article, "Living with Contradictions:

Critical Practices in the Age of Supply-Side Aesthetics", Abigail Solomon-Godeau begins by addressing the place and the function of critics within the "delirious pluralism" of the art market in the 1980's. Referring to the rapid rise in price of art works, the "quantum increase" of the international art market, the creation of newly interested individuals, (e.g.: art consultants), and the increasing participation of corporations in all things 'art', Solomon-Godeau writes of how the critic, who normally functions as a mediator between monetary and cultural capital, has now been made superfluous.

This redundancy of criticism, however, can hardly be understood as a consequence of these developments alone. Rather, the current state of most art criticism represents the final dissolution between what was, in any case, only a fragile bulwark between market forces and their institutional ratification, a highly permeable membrane separating venture capital, so to speak, from blue-chip investment. As a result, art criticism has been forced to cede its illusory belief in the separateness or disinterestedness of critical discourse (1987: 4).

In this essay, Solomon-Godeau meets objections voiced by critics such as Rosler by explicating the conditions of possibility for critical photographic practice in the 'age of Reagan'. Moreover, her agenda extends beyond the photographic object of inquiry to consider the practice of the critic within this situation as well. "What is the nature, the terms, even the possibility of a critical practice in art criticism?" (ibid.). Yet there are certain moves enacted in this inquiry, certain assumptions, which allow Solomon-Godeau to elide the severity of the questions

now posed at photographic criticism. Most particularly, in asserting the 'redundancy' of a critic's practice, Solomon-Godeau renders this activity not only tautological, but in effect, and in the end, avoids the salient issues at stake in this problematic.

Interestingly, this is a tactic frequently used by postmodern theorists to circumvent some of their own, more difficult, assumptions. By reducing history, meaning, or those differences which produce both, to that which no longer matters, postmodern theorists no longer need to speak about the difficulties these concepts pose for interpretation. They may effectively suppress considerations of their own constructions of political difference. However, Solomon-Godeau's project in explicating the possibility of critical practice precisely entails the recovering of a historical specificity: in this case, postmodernist photography 'the third time around'.

Solomon-Godeau's interest lies in underscoring the contradictions of a critical practice which inhabits, as it takes its existence from, the institutions of art and commodity. Thus, she traces out how a corpus of postmodern photographic works "move from a position of perceptible cultural resistance to one of accommodation with existing modes of production and an apparent capitulation to the very desires the early work put in question" (ibid.: 10). In this respect, she looks to the re-positioning of an artist

such as Sherrie Levine who has clearly moved across such terrain. What specifically troubles, and interests Solomon-Godeau here is the current propensity on Levine's part to now negate the materialist critique which critics once found in her work. As Solomon-Godeau explains it, Levine's disavowal has less to do with the question of subverting the commodity status of art work, than recuperating artistic status for herself. Thus Solomon-Godeau quotes Levine as stating in a 1986 interview:

I never thought I wasn't making art and I never thought of the art I was making as not a commodity. I never thought that what I was doing was in strict opposition to what else was going on ... (ibid.:10).

This statement is in many respects similar to one made by Barbara Kruger in a 1987 interview. Interestingly, both interviews of Levine and Kruger were undertaken by the journal ARTnews, which Richard Bolton describes as "the best example of the marketing role played by criticism: its People magazine approach is the best vehicle to certify the 'arrival' (and thus the collectibility) of a new star" (1989: 17). Both featured the artists not only in cover articles, but featured their faces on the covers. In the Kruger interview, the artist responds to queries pertaining as to why she was selling her work in commercial galleries and why she wasn't simply printing posters.

These were objects. I wasn't going to stick them on the wall with pushpins. I wanted them to enter the marketplace because I began to understand that outside the market there is nothing - not a piece of lint, a cardigan, a coffee table, a human being. That's what the frames were about: how to commodify them. It was

the most effective packaging device. Signed, sealed and delivered (in Bolton, 1989: 16).

Both Levine's and Kruger's statements exemplify the acknowledgment and the acquaintance of artists with(in) the discursive system which produces them and their work. For Solomon-Godeau, this instance illustrates the "material and discursive forces which both bind and exceed the individual artist" (1987: 11). But for the most part, these 'material and discursive forces' do not include the participation of the critic. Solomon-Godeau finds that Kruger and Levine's recuperations of objecthood for their art, and artistic subjectivity for themselves, are due on the whole to the precinct of art photography and its struggle to meet the evolutionary demands of the marketplace.

When this situation substantially changed, it was not primarily because of the influence of critics or the efforts of dealers. Rather, it was the result of three factors: the self-created cul-de-sac of art photography which foreclosed the ability to produce anything new for a market which had been constituted in the previous decade; a vastly expanded market with new types of purchasers; and the assimilation of postmodernist strategies back into the mass culture which had in part engendered them (ibid.: 15).

I find Kruger's and Levine's statements to be much more honest than Solomon-Godeau's. For these artists, who built their fame and fortune upon a critique of a commodified and patriarchal culture, do not exempt themselves from the contradictions which have been built around them. Yet, Solomon-Godeau has for the most part excused herself, and the critical writings of others, from this construction. There is no mention in this article of how critics, by



introducing and interpreting the critical activity this new work, effectively designed its entrance into the marketplace. There is no acknowledgment made that the "new types of purchasers" of which Solomon-Godeau speaks are those who 'appreciate' the presence of critique; for it reassures them of their liberalism and pluralism. There is no recognition that the production of a new photographic canon for art photography - and an accompanying roster of art stars - was precisely furnished within the affirmative institution of photographic criticism. The critical practice of these works was made distinct, fashioned into an original moment: styled by photographic criticism. Yet Solomon-Godeau only claims "a part, (a small part), of a cultural apparatus of undifferentiated promotion in the service of supply-side aesthetics" (ibid.: 21).

Solomon-Godeau prefers to speak of criticism's complicity with a commodified and domesticating art market on more abstract grounds. She concludes her essay by re-invoking Benjamin's rhetorical question of 1938: "Rather than ask, 'what is the attitude of a work of art to the relations of production of its time', I should like to ask, 'what is its position within them?'". Solomon-Godeau finds that this question is still germane. "It underscores the need for critical practices to establish a contestatory space in which the form of utterance or address speaks to otherwise unrecognized, or passively accepted, meanings,

values and beliefs which cultural production normally reproduces and legitimizes" (ibid.: 19). Yet many assumptions underpinning the practice of critical writing on photography remain unaddressed.

Solomon-Godeau advocates an approach to critical practice and criticism's discourse which recognizes that each is situated within the contradictory tensions of an apparatus. In this, I can find no fault. Her assertions throughout this essay demand that one give up, as a standard of assessment, a criteria of origins for a consideration of effects. In that the interventions of a postmodern photographic practice cannot be distinguished independently outside of the concrete situation in which it operates, there is no formal construct which can be determined beforehand. The institutional critique of a photographic practice can only be discerned in the scattered relations of a particular condition; it represents itself only as the specific tenor of an intervention which moves jaggedly among a contradictory situation. Solomon-Godeau also applies this condition of possibility to photographic criticism. "Both the critic and the artist, situated within the restricted realm of high culture, are from the very outset enmeshed within a particularly dense matrix of contradiction" (ibid.: 21).

Yet the present moment of this situation also involves the past; of what was said and done before, and how these events have shaped the present. By positing the redundancy

of the critic, Solomon-Godeau belies a wish to forget the past; to domesticate it and place it at a far remove. And in so doing, the collusive and conflictual practices of photographic criticism can again be safely held at a distance.

This is also a transaction undertaken by John Tagg in a recent essay which begins by describing the "wreckage of criticism". "[C]riticism loses itself: it is totaled. Some of the wrecks may still be on the road, but most are headed for the breaker's yard" (1989: 22). It is, of course, much the same operation used by postmodern criticism to claim the end of historical differences. It is a move which erases all those differences which inform and bind a critic's explanations to specific institutional, political and epistemological situations.

As I have attempted to show throughout this thesis, there is no critical discourse which can stand free of those concrete historical circumstances which allow its conditions of possibility. Criticism's representations are as effected as much by the critic's situation, as on the situating of those people or things which are represented. In this manner, the talismanic proportions of difference are also profoundly conditioned by what or whom speaks of 'difference'. What sort of politics does the assertions (or negations) of this theory of representation allow, and who is enabled by it?

Contrary to Crimp's assertions in 1980, postmodernism is all about pluralism. In claiming the fictionality of the self, it may slide into a position which denies subjects any difference from which to re-invent new lives. In charging that all is now a representation, that there is no 'outside' , it may refute the possibility of a proactive politics which is based upon a pro-filmic event. Representation comes to refer only to itself: an hollow body exempt of hierarchies of difference. It no longer can speak to us, or for us, because, presumably, it doesn't distort or reflect, or remain in relation to any prior reality. Words themselves become vacant: 'race', 'sexuality' or 'class' do not mean much when they are removed from their actuality. The only differences held in a postmodern theory of representation are those of representation itself. And that is no difference at all.

If 'difference' becomes a choice between what has already been chosen, then the question of who does the choosing cannot be overlooked. The status of different people is still designated and reproduced by those who (already) have the means to do so.

'Difference' is most often constructed as belonging to 'others', while the position of those who do the constructing is never questioned, and thus safely remains the centrifugal source of recognition. As Richard Dyer writes of the properties of 'whiteness', (an ethnic category to which most 'postmodernists' belong); "In the realm of

categories, black is always marked as a color ... and it is always particularizing; whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularizing quality, because it is everything - white is no color because it is all colors" (1988: 45). Many feminist theorists have also long challenged and confronted the representational theories of postmodernism. They question the assertions of a theory which claims that truth and knowledge are false, and that the 'subject' is dead, at the very time when certain people have begun to claim certain knowledges for themselves, and begun to claim themselves as subjects. More recently, the delegative powers of representation have been brought close to home by the notorious Helms amendment, which upheld the rights of certain 'experts' to equate homoeroticism with obscenity.<sup>(3)</sup> In writing of the strategies of photographic appropriation used by the anonymous San Francisco collective Boys/Girls With Arms Akimbo to fight the amendment, Douglas Crimp points to how such "postmodern" practices have been extremely enabling to "movement politics". But he also refers to that which was "excluded from postmodern theory which made it considerably less enabling"; namely, "the dangerous, even murderous, ways in which homophobia, in rendering us blind, structures every aspect of our culture" (1990: 47-49).

Recently, there has been the emergence of new photographic works which are based upon what could loosely

be termed the actuality of experience. These are photographs which often move beyond an institutional critique, or an analysis of social representation, to refer to those experiences which inform the self, but are not conventionally presentable. These are photographs which often address the limitations of explanations of representation and identity. They speak of things which inflict upon the self, of things which cut deeply, but which cannot always be found within the realm of the semiotic. The raw material of this work is not the simulated excesses of the mass media, nor the dying light of a modernist aesthetic, but the actual events of people's lives; of the different pains and celebrations that can be found there.

After postmodernism's final rites for the 'subject', there is now a return to the pictorial, the narrative or the expressionistic in photographic practice. In many respects, this new 'return of the repressed' is due to certain horrific crises now facing people's lives; certain awful events which cannot be abstracted away. As Jan Zita Grover has observed, "At the butt end of a modernism that reduces processes, materials, and the world of human collectivity to formalist play and analysis, AIDS provides many of us with a paradigm of the ineffectiveness of even the most rigorous modernisms: their failure to acknowledge the specificity and historicity of our condition" (1989: 2) The political stakes involved in claiming a difference under the cultural "epidemic of signification" (Treichler, 1987) surrounding

AIDS are very serious indeed. Identity becomes not just something to be deconstructed and shown to be a fictional construct, but reaffirmed for political and personal purposes. As Douglas Crimp writes of young artists who work within the context of AIDS disobedience and activism, "Identity is understood by them to be, among other things, coercively imposed by perceived sexual orientation or HIV status; it is, at the same time, willfully taken on, in defiant declaration of affinity with the 'others' of AIDS: queers, women, Blacks, Latinos, drug users, sex workers" (1990b: 18).

While this 'affinity' may sound like another possible strategy for the occlusion of differences, it has in fact brought about an acknowledgment of the difficulties which speaking of difference entails. The AIDS activist art undertaken by collectives such as Gran Fury, the Silence = Death Project, Little Elvis or Boys/Girls With Arms Akimbo not only often employs practices of postmodernist appropriation, but also, following postmodernism's questioning of a 'unique individual' forgoes the nomenclature of authorship. Some have won a degree of acceptance in the art world: Gran Fury now receives funding, has exhibited in museums and is included in 'artists pages' in art magazines. But this work would remain difficult, if not impossible, to domesticate within the confines of an art world product. For its point of

departure is not an institutional critique of an aesthetic, but rather those social conditions which are viewed differently from the personal perspectives of people whom they most effect. As Crimp writes, "In the end, when the final product is wheatpasted around the city, carried on protest placards, and worn on T-shirts, our politics, and our cohesion around these politics, become visible to us, and to those who will potentially join us" (1990b: 20). And in the end, they may also become visible to those museums, critics, and publics, which had heretofore remained blind to the differences their own definitions of difference have made.

In a similar manner, as museum's increasingly acknowledge the existence of cultural racism and attempt to redress past exclusions of Afro-Americans and 'people of color' within their walls, difficult questions come to the fore which trouble held definitions of difference. As Maurice Berger has written, (1990), recent events and interventions have forced people, including the most well-intentioned and 'informed' cultural theorists, to rethink their own cultural indifference and silence on issues of race. "Not until the white people who now hold the power in the art world scrutinize their own motives and attitudes towards people of color will it be possible to unlearn racism" (ibid.: 74).

These, of course, are lessons for photographic criticism as well; lessons which cannot be met by a



quotational play or pastiche of metaphorical difference, but by a recognition of the very powerful and real - often oppressive and occlusive - differences which criticism makes. If photographic critics are to be committed to cultural change, then there is a need for constant change on the part of themselves: a need for an ongoing and contingent self-critique. As the Afro-American writer Bell Hooks states, "This interrogation itself becomes an act of critical intervention, fundamentally fostering an attitude of vigilance rather than denial" (1989: 20). In speaking of the representations of the photograph, a critic cannot remain blind to his or her own representations. For in choosing blindness, a political decision is made: a choice to remain taciturn, unanswerable and unaccountable. In choosing blindness, a distanced and disinterested authority is chosen. And we all must be held to our words.

## Footnotes

1. Solomon-Godeau writes that once postmodern photographic works became articulated as a style, the critical potential of previous works was also put under question. She finds that:

In large part, and in this particular instance, this was the consequence of a 'second generation' of postmodern photographers - Frank Majore, Alan Belcher, Stephen Frailey, and so forth - whose relation to the sources and significance of their appropriative strategies (primarily advertising) seemed to be predominantly a function of fascination. Insofar as stupified or celebratory fascination produces an identification with the image world of commodity culture no different from the mesmerisation of any other consumer, the possibility of critique is effectively precluded (1987: 12).

In this, Solomon-Godeau also appears to want a guarantee or correspondence for the politics of a photographic work.

2. Many feminist theorists have criticized Owens' appropriation of feminism for a postmodernist project. Moreover, feminist critiques of and interventions into postmodernism's preservations of power relations have been widespread. See for instance: Nancy K. Miller, "Changing the Subject: Authorship. Writing and the Reader", in Feminist Studies/Critical Studies. ed. Teresa de Laurentis, Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 1986, pp. 102-120.; Nancy Hartsock, "Rethinking Modernism", Cultural Critique, 7, Fall 1987, pp. 187-206.; Sandra Harding, "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?", in Feminism and Methodology. ed. Sandra Harding, Indiana University Press, Bloomington: 1987, pp. 1-14.; and Elspeth Probyn, "Travels in the Postmodern: Making Sense of the Local", in Feminism/Postmodernism. ed. Linda Nicholson, Routledge, New York: 1990.

2. In the summer of 1989, U.S. Senator Jesse Helms, (R-N.C.), lobbied to pass a censorious bill which sought to restrict and punish the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities' funding of "indecent or obscene" works of art. The bill was defeated, and a substitute "compromise" bill was passed by the U.S. Congress on Oct. 7, 1989. While hailed in some quarters as a victory for arts advocates, Carol S. Vance has pointed out that the new bill "covertly circulates and legitimizes conservative definitions of obscenity among liberal, educated people who would, in other circumstances, indignantly reject them". Pointing in particular to the new regulation's definition of "obscene materials, including but

not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the sexual exploitation of children, or individuals involved in sex acts", (a phrasing taken almost verbatim from the Helms admendment), Vance writes, "It is a list that mixes up acts that are stigmatized (homoeroticism and sadomasochism), illegal (child pornography), and conventional (any individuals engaged in sex acts, the unspecified form of sex here being heterosexuality). Typically, the stigmatized acts apprear first and are intended to set off the reader's anxiety, their negativity about sex and homophobia. Critical thinking stops and the sexual red alert flashes". Carol S. Vance, "Misunderstanding Obscenity", in Art in America, May 1990, p. 51.

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## Conclusion

The project of this thesis has been to investigate those historical and theoretical conditions of possibility which have allowed for the political practices of photographic criticism. Based upon changing theoretical constructs of 'the subject' and subjectivity, my interest has been centered upon how these shifting concepts have lent photographic criticism not only strategic directions for its critical activity, but also certain allowances for the continuation of its judgmental authorities. In looking to the specific alterations of photographic criticism across various historical conjunctures, I have found that as photographic criticism appropriates theories of 'the subject' in order to challenge received knowledges of photographic representation, it also very often uses these same theories to reinforce its own authoritative knowledges.

In effect, my thesis inquires into the logic which critics construct for themselves. The political ramifications of this project have become all the more pronounced as of late, particularly under the influences of recent theorizing which now propose the endeavor of representation to be entirely deadlocked. This theoretical move - which argues the 'impossibility of representation' - has also spurred a trend towards self-reflexivity on the part of the critic. It has now become more difficult for

critics to avoid consideration of how their own practices of representation are as implicated within formations of power and knowledge as any other. Yet, in many respects, critics continue to remain blind to those constraints and conceits which govern their practices.

My investigations have centered upon critical appropriations of theories of 'the subject' and representation because it has been these theories which have consistently tempered the conventional authorities of representation. Insofar as these theories have challenged the veracities of photographic representation, they have undermined the construction of a stable and unified ontology for the photograph; asserting instead that the processes and products of photography are historically constituted within incomplete and unstable conjunctures of power and knowledge. Furthermore, this denial of exclusivity extends to those 'subjects' who take and view photographs. These theories have steadily negated an autonomous and isolated author from which a privileged representation originates; asserting instead only the uncertainties of a historical subject caught within fluid relations of institutions, subjectivities and social practices. Moreover, given that these refusals of a unified medium or subject entail an understanding of meaning as ideologically constructed, they also force the recognition that various definitions of 'photography' or 'the subject' are themselves inscriptions of, and inscribed within, specific local and historical



conditions. The explanations of critics then, are equally bound to their own institutional and epistemological situations.

As I have covered this shifting ground of theory and practice, what has interested me has not only been the historical formation of these conceptualizations, but the ways in which they are so often imparted, and then simply parted with. Despite the fact that these modes of analysis now find endorsement within the purview of contemporary photographic criticism and practice, this agreement does not necessarily entail an adherence to its directions. What is so often discursively evoked is then so often practically ignored.

In addressing this troubling silence across certain theoretical moments, I have found that the degree to which criticism can claim certain epistemological authority is dependent upon that specific political and historical situation within which it resides. Thus, in reading off the contradictory tendencies of history and theory, I have discerned the different directions in which they have pulled photographic criticism; directions which sometimes create, and at other times undermine its constructions of assurance and privilege.

In examining the appropriation of an early structuralism for the operations of photographic criticism and practice in North America and Britain, I found that its

possible analytic and political uses were constrained by the locations to which it was appended: respectively, the concerns of an 'art world' and a socialist photographic practice. Similarly, as this structuralist method was itself limited by certain of its formalist assumptions, I found that the ability of photographic critics to structurally assess photographic practices of representation were also restrained. In North America, these assumptions contributed to a continuation of the traditions of modernism and criticism: in which the critic, viewing the photograph as an isolated and autonomous object, would recuperate notions of the 'artistic subject' and a rhetoric of realism in order to explain this object. In Britain, the consequences of this abstraction entailed the reinforcement of dualistic oppositions, in which a more 'real' or truthful photographic practice was counterposed against the falsified representations of a capitalist society. Yet, the positivities of this historical moment lay in the practical and theoretical development of those photographers who also wrote about and theorized representation, and who used this combinatory practice to progress from this base. When theorists are also artists, and artists theorists, then categorical differences (between creative and critical texts; between theory and practice) become eroded.

I have argued that post-structuralism's theorizing of subjectivity and representation importantly complicates many of the distanced administrations of photographic criticism.

In particular, I found that the work of certain critics who consider the imbrication of subjectivity, experience and photographic representation crucially leads to a re-evaluation of both photographic practice and the politics that practice entails.

In examining the writings of feminist critics in this respect, I found that the positivity of their accounts lies in the refusal of an essential notion of a gendered subject, while simultaneously advocating the mobility of this subject in its experiences of past and present significant events. Gendered subjects can thus be understood as provisionally positioned both historically and semiotically. The subject's production of photographic signification, and its positioning by the same, is always then, contingent and revisable. And this contingency holds important political possibilities. For it allows not only for the experience of semiotic interactions which constitute a subject, but also proposes a subject who, by reflecting upon this experience, is able to remain open to future alterations or reconstructions of identity.

Yet, the contingency and uncertainty of an articulated subject troubles the jurisdiction of photographic criticism. As my examinations of Barthes' Camera Lucida, and his reception by Paul Smith illustrates, to turn from the photographic object to the viewing subject entails its own set of difficulties. For such a 'subjective science' such

as Barthes' precisely disallows a distanced or 'objective' stance. The analytic distance which has made criticism's discourse so possible is drowned among Barthes' methodology. Yet criticism cannot turn to the experiential without a great deal of ideological violence. As I have stated, to insert the critic into the area of inquiry is necessarily to change him or her into something fundamentally different. And herein lies the difficulty.

I have argued that it is the epistemological impracticability of this contingency which has led critics to seek their explanations elsewhere. Despite the space of uncertainty which post-structuralism proposes, certain predicates of its thought have been appropriated by photographic criticism in order to grant the latter some basis of certitude. As I examined a psychoanalytically-informed photographic criticism, I found that, while it is based upon an anti-essentialist notion of 'the subject', it acts to posit subjects and photographs in a priori or pre-figured terms. This form of criticism is most contradictory in its stated aims and practical ends, and especially difficult in its politics.

In contrast to the certainties posed by this latter form of photographic criticism, critical histories of photography question the very basis of received evidences for photography. Moreover, as illustrated in the later writings of John Tagg, the methodology proposed by such historical analyses allow a manifold consideration of not

only the 'truth claims' of particular archives, but the desires for certitude of photographic criticism as well. However, the liabilities of these critical histories lie in a tendency to leave in abeyance questions of the subject. This absence in effect allows the photograph to be placed as a privileged object which exacts domination. Despite claims for historical contingency in this writing, there is still a pull towards certitude and fixed and singular destinations, most notably in the positioning of the photograph as an institutional apparatus of the state.

One may presume that as a trajectory of critical theories grows and increases in its influences upon forms of criticism, that it would increasingly temper the authorities of the latter. More specifically, this line of thought may be seen to be especially applicable to photographic criticism, which has historically borrowed so heavily from theories which renunciate unified subjects, determinant origins, and stable, ontological objects. And yet, if we were to mistakenly follow such a linear conception up to photographic criticism's appropriation of postmodernist theories, we are faced with quite a contradictory movement. For as I have shown, the use of postmodern theories by photographic criticism has only served to further the authoritative aims of an explanatory apparatus and its complicity with the constructions of canon. Moreover, postmodern theories have allowed photographic criticism to

deny, and disguise, these very privileges, even as it enacts them.

However, it is again 'the subject' which troubles criticism's text. For under the cruelties of specific recent and past events, certain subjects are now insisting upon their differences. In contrast to many of the theorizations so readily embraced by a postmodern photographic criticism, these people mark the existence and the politics of difference. Pointing to both the pains and the celebrations which difference makes, they force a recognition of the need to stake a claim; to mark out that provisional spot where one may stand, if only momentarily.

Under the exigency of practical conditions, it becomes difficult for critics to continue to acquit themselves from the differences their explanations make. As we appropriate the concepts and words of others, we must recognize the political directions these words take. Furthermore, we must acknowledge what has been left silent as well as pronounced. For silences equally speak for indifferent authorities. Theory often enables the interruption of an impervious complacency. But it is more the political practices of everyday lives, and the affectual and emotional stakes of these practices, which make a difference and lead us to remember our own.